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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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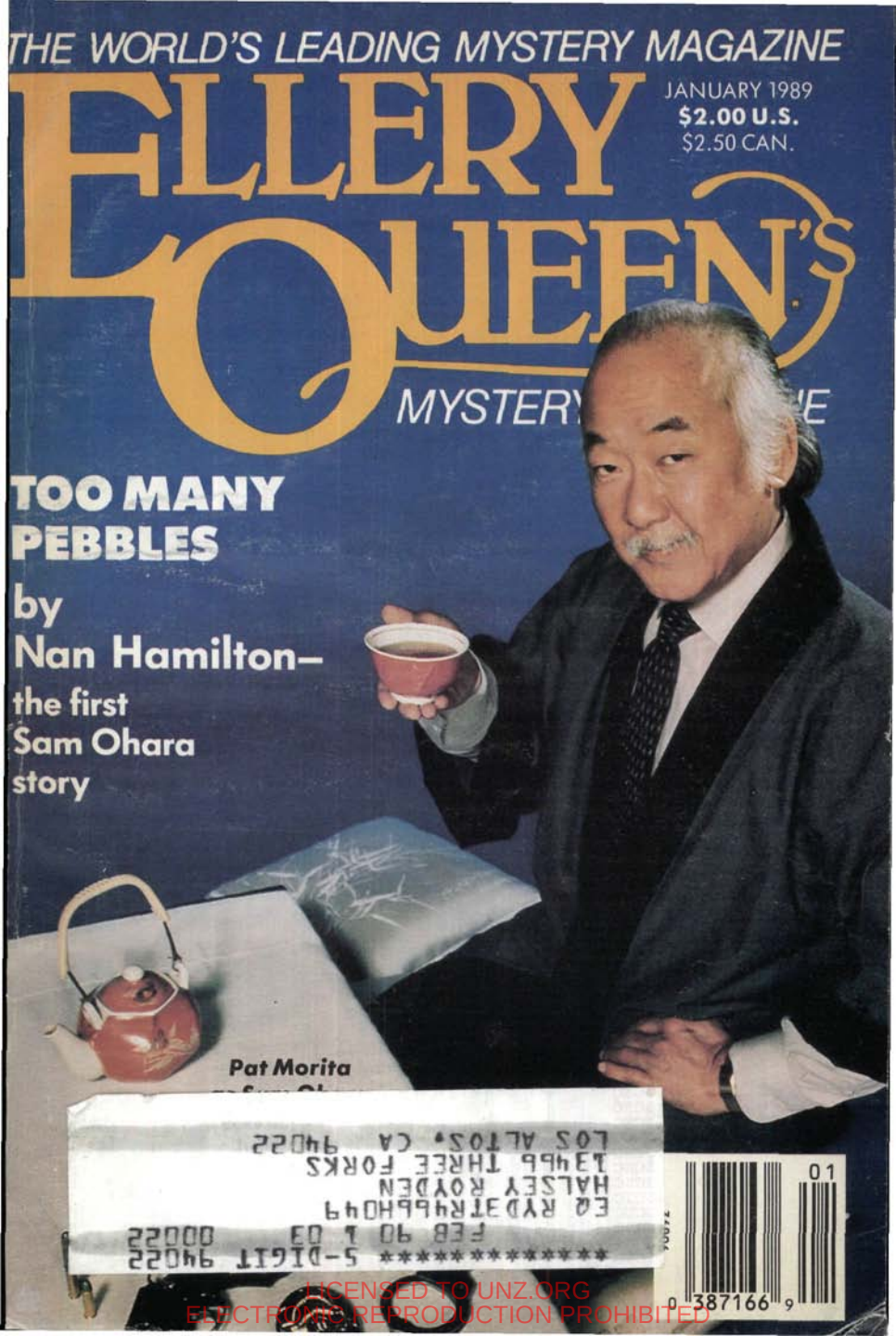

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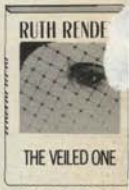

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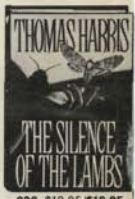

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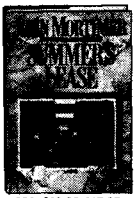

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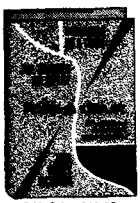

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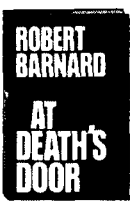

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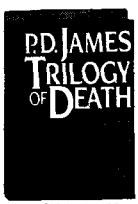

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a *NEW* Ben Snow story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

The cabin was empty. A dusty table and chair stood in the center of the room, and a candle stub gave evidence of overnight use sometime in the past. Then Floating Cloud saw something and gasped. It was a leather quiver for arrows, dyed a deep blue, with tribal markings in black. "This is my father's," she said, lifting it from the floor. "He has been here."

"There are no arrows in it," Ben observed. He took a quick look around the rest of the cabin. "And no bow. Did he have a rifle, too?"

"Yes." She sat down by the table. "He would never have left this behind. Something has happened to him. Something bad . . ."

SACAJAWEA'S GOLD

by EDWARD D. HOCH

It was in the early 1890s, shortly after the battle at Wounded Knee had put an end to the Indian Wars, that Ben Snow rode south through the new state of Wyoming. Sparsely settled, except for the strip along its southern edge where the transcontinental railroad passed through, it was still a beautiful place, filled with natural wonders that were magnificent to behold. Riding through Yellowstone National Park, he kept a tight rein on Oats as they neared a geyser spouting a plume of boiling water a hundred feet in the air.

"You don't see something like that every day, boy," he said, patting the horse's neck.

Then he saw the runaway—a little pinto on the other side of the stream, terrified by the sudden belching from the earth and galloping off with an equally frightened rider clinging to its back. "Come on, Oats!" Ben shouted, spurring him to a gallop.

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Roughly calculating the speed of the runaway, Ben aimed at a point where their paths should intersect. He urged Oats through the mist of hot water sweeping off the top of the geyser. It was only as he drew closer that he realized it was an Indian girl clinging tenaciously to the pinto's back, her long black braids trailing behind her.

Finally Oats was alongside the runaway, matching its stride, and Ben reached out to grab the loose reins, bringing the pinto under control with a firm hand. He dismounted and helped the trembling girl to the ground. She couldn't have been more than nineteen or twenty, with high cheekbones and deep, dark eyes. "Thank you," she said in English. "The geyser frightened my horse."

"I'm glad I happened by. My name's Ben Snow."

"I am Floating Cloud," she replied, brushing off the fringed buckskin dress that reached almost to her knees. Beneath it she wore buckskin pants and moccasins.

"Are you Shoshone?" he asked.

"How did you know?"

"The markings on your clothes and horse. I'm pleased that you speak English."

"Most of my people can converse in English. The soldiers and traders have taught us."

"You're from the reservation?" Wind River, the largest Indian reservation in the state, was about a hundred miles to the southeast. Since the conclusion of the Indian Wars, the tribes had been moved from their homes and settled on reservations.

"From Wind River, yes." Her head came only to his shoulders and she smiled up at him as she spoke. "I might have come from the Crow Reservation in Montana. It's just as close."

Ben shook his head. "There are no Crow women as pretty as a young Shoshone."

"You seem to know a great deal about my people."

"No other tribe has put its name on so many natural wonders in this part of the country. Here in the park, there is a Shoshone Lake, and between here and your reservation lies the Shoshone Forest. But you travel away from the reservation. Do the soldiers allow that?"

"Our home is too vast for them to patrol the entire boundary. They mainly watch the young braves, to be certain no war parties are forming. Squaws are usually left alone."

"But you've left the reservation and ridden a hundred miles," Ben

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pointed out. "There isn't even a bedroll on your pinto. Where are you headed?"

"I seek my father, a Shoshone warrior." The smile was gone and her eyes were serious now. "He went off on a quest two moons ago and nothing has been heard from him since."

"What sort of a quest?"

"That does not concern you." Her voice was still pleasant but he knew they had moved into a forbidden area of conversation. She threw one buckskinned leg over the blanket on the back of her horse and boosted herself back up with ease. "Thank you for your help, Mr. Snow. May we meet again someday."

Ben watched her as she rode off. Far in the distance, another small geyser had come to life, spewing steam several feet into the air. Why am I letting her ride away alone, he wondered. He mounted Oats and quickly set off after her. "Wait, Floating Cloud!" he called. "Let me ride with you!"

She reined her horse and he caught up with her at the edge of the woods. "Now it is you who are going the wrong way," she said.

"It's not safe for you to ride alone."

"The Indians will not harm me."

"Even if they don't, there are plenty of white men who might. It will be dark soon and you have noplace to sleep."

"I thought I would have reached my destination by now."

"We can make better time together with me leading the way. I know this region well."

She bit her lower lip, uncertain of how to proceed. "I am unsure of my directions from here," she admitted. "I'm looking for Saddle Mountain."

"That's east of here. You're way off course."

"Could—could you show me?"

"I'll take you there. We can make it before sundown."

Floating Cloud's goal was a little cabin nestled in the woods at the base of Saddle Mountain. Though they were still within the boundaries of the park, Ben doubted that the existence of the cabin was known to most of the people patrolling there. Yellowstone was a vast place, almost as large as the Wind River reservation, and parts of it were still virtually unknown.

"Is this where you expect to find your father?" he asked as they rode up to the cabin. There were no signs of life, and a broken window gave evidence that it was unoccupied.

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"He was headed here," she said. She slid off the pinto and went up to the cabin. Ben dismounted and followed her. The door, without a lock, was tied shut with a piece of rope.

"Let me go in first," Ben suggested.

He feared what they might find there, but the cabin was empty. A dusty table and chair stood in the center of the room, and a candle stub gave evidence of overnight use sometime in the past. Then Floating Cloud saw something and gasped. It was a leather quiver for arrows, dyed a deep blue, with tribal markings in black. "This is my father's," she said, lifting it from the floor. "He has been here."

"There are no arrows in it," Ben observed. He took a quick look around the rest of the cabin. "And no bow. Did he have a rifle, too?"

"Yes." She sat down by the table. "He would never have left this behind. Something has happened to him. Something bad."

"Perhaps I could help."

She looked up at him uncertainly. He waited, and after a moment she began to speak. "When the Army forced us to settle on the Wind River Reservation, my father, Walking Bear, became friendly with an old Shoshone squaw. She was like a kindly grandmother to him, and he often took my brother and me to visit her. She told us tales of the great Lewis and Clark expedition nearly ninety years ago, and said she had guided them through Indian country. She even saved them once from an attack by her people."

"There *was* a Shoshone woman who guided the expedition," Ben remembered.

"She was Sacajawea. Someday her name will be as honored as that of Pocahontas."

"That's it—I remember now. Do you have an Indian name, too?"

"My Indian name is Togwotee, but I prefer the sound of Floating Cloud."

"It's a lovely name," he agreed. "But you're so young. How old were you when you knew Sacajawea?"

"Only eleven or twelve. She died on the reservation in eighteen eighty-four. She claimed to be ninety-seven years old at the end, and I suppose she could have been. It's an odd story about Sacajawea. She was captured by another tribe at the age of thirteen and sold to a Canadian trapper who took her as one of his two wives. When the trapper was hired as a guide by Lewis and Clark a few years later, it was she who really guided the expedition and saved their lives. One of the trapper's wives died in 'eighteen twelve and it was believed to be Sacajawea, but this old squaw told us it was the other

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wife who died. She knew everything about the expedition and she claimed to have proof of who she was."

"What sort of proof?"

Floating Cloud took a deep breath.

"She claimed that Lewis and Clark had given her a large leather pouch filled with solid gold coins. She said she still had it with her on the reservation."

"Did you or your father ever see it?"

"No. She promised to show it to us one day to prove the truth of her words, but then she died. Nothing like it was found among her meager belongings."

"What does this have to do with your father's disappearance?"

"Two months ago he told me he'd found a clue to the location of Sacajawea's gold. A trader named Gus Capri told him about a cabin in Yellowstone where she often came. My father told me he was coming here and would return with the gold."

"*Why did you wait so long before setting out to find him?*"

"My brother urged me not to go. He said the soldiers had probably caught our father away from the reservation and imprisoned him. For a time I feared he was right, but the more I thought about it the more I knew the soldiers would never have found him. The area between this cabin and the reservation is one hundred miles of thick forest. No one could capture Walking Bear in the forest."

"And now you have his quiver."

"Proof that he reached this cabin."

"But the quiver is empty. What did he usually carry in it?"

"A supply of arrows and two short bows. It was his hunting weapon. The rifle was for protection."

"I thought the Army had confiscated all rifles."

"Some of my people managed to keep theirs."

Ben thought about it, gazing out at the rapidly fading daylight. "It'll be dark before we can get very far. I suggest we spend the night here. In the morning I'll ride with you back to Wind River. I'm headed in that direction, anyway."

She must have known she had little choice. For the moment the quest for her father seemed to be at a dead end. "All right," she agreed, "but I must be on the trail early."

Ben got the bedroll from Oats's back and gave it to her. "Put it where you want. I'll sleep on a blanket over by the door."

She chose to sleep quite close to him, but he couldn't help noticing that she went to sleep with a hunting knife in one hand . . .

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After a light breakfast of food from Ben's saddlebags, they set off on the trail south. Soon they were out of the park and into the Shoshone Forest, riding the mountainous trails that skirted the Continental Divide. He could understand why a Shoshone brave who knew these trails would be safe from the Army, with it virtually impossible to see more than fifty feet ahead through the trees.

Since finding her father's quiver in the deserted cabin, Floating Cloud had been subdued, speaking only when necessary. The journey back took them most of the day. Finally, as they came out of the forest and headed toward more open land, she turned to him and said, "The reservation is straight ahead. You may leave me now."

"I'd like to meet some of your people, if I may. And I'd like to visit the grave of the old squaw you told me about."

"That is far to the south of here, at least fifty miles across reservation land."

"As I told you, I'm riding south. It would be on my way."

"All right," she decided. "We will find my brother first."

They rode for another hour, passing small groups of tepees and other areas where young men were engaged in building wooden cabins and other dwellings. Here and there a village was beginning to take shape. For better or for worse, the Shoshone had found a permanent home. At one settlement, Floating Cloud reined in her pinto and stopped before two young braves carrying a rough split log. She addressed one of them.

"This is my brother, Swift Eagle," she told Ben.

The muscular Shoshone nodded without speaking.

"This is Ben Snow. He rescued me in the park when the horse was frightened by a geyser."

Swift Eagle signaled the other brave and they lowered the log to the ground. "What were you doing so far from home, little one?" He spoke careful English, and his classic features were handsome. Ben could more readily imagine him leading a delegation of braves to meet with the governor than leading a war party.

"Looking for our father," his sister replied to his question.

"Our father is dead."

Floating Cloud slid off the pinto. "I will believe that when I have seen his body, not before."

"It is a big woods out there, little one," Swift Eagle told her, gripping her by the shoulders. "Our father might have fallen from his horse, or encountered a grizzly bear, or even been attacked by renegades from another tribe."

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"We found his quiver," she said, turning and taking it from her pouch. "This proves he reached the cabin in the Yellowstone."

Swift Eagle took the blue quiver in his hands. "His arrows and bows are missing. This is proof he was in some sort of fight, with an animal or a human. What of his rifle?"

"We found nothing else," Ben told him.

"If he was alive, he would have returned before now. Why would he stay away?"

Before Floating Cloud could answer, they were interrupted by the arrival of a grizzled white man driving a buckboard. "There's been a killing down near Bull Lake," he told them. "That halfbreed, Kinderland, was run through by a Shoshone war spear."

"Kinderland, dead?" Swift Eagle seemed disturbed. "There has been no violence on this reservation since the white man brought us here. Who did this thing, Gus?"

Ben caught the name and knew this must be Gus Capri, the white trader Floating Cloud had mentioned. He seemed on good relations with the Shoshone, but nervous, darting his eyes toward Floating Cloud. "I don't know nothin'," he replied. "An Indian on horseback killed him with a spear and rode off, that's all I know."

"I must go there at once." Swift Eagle turned to his fellow worker and said a few quick words in his native tongue. Then he asked the trader, "Where near Bull Lake did it happen?"

"By the burial mounds. I drove Kinderland out there on my buckboard. I was waitin' for him while he prowled around. All of a sudden this Shoshone in full warpaint bursts outta the trees and rides him down. He never had a chance."

"It was no one you recognized?"

Gus Capri shook his head nervously. "Never seen him before."

"Maybe he wasn't from this reservation," Ben suggested. "Maybe he wasn't even a true Shoshone."

Swift Eagle went off for his horse and Floating Cloud remained with Ben. "I hardly knew the halfbreed," she told him. "He worked around the reservation, earning his keep."

"Why would he have been prowling around the burial mounds?"

"I have no idea."

Capri, still standing nearby, doffed his hat to Floating Cloud and said, "I wanted to tell you, Miss, after your brother left—"

"What is it, Gus?"

"I won't tell another soul, but I thought you should know. That Injun warrior who rode down Kinderland and speared him—"

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"Yes?"

"It was your father, Miss. It was Walking Bear."

Captain Robert Grant was a handsome Army officer in his thirties, too young to have fought in the Civil War, even though he bore a name that reminded everyone of the conflict. He was in command of one detachment of cavalry on the reservation, charged with keeping the peace and making certain no large war parties went off to make trouble. He rode up about an hour later while Ben was still talking with some of Floating Cloud's friends and family.

"I'm looking into the killing of the halfbreed, Kinderland," Captain Grant told them, dismounting easily from his horse. Two enlisted men with him remained mounted, indicating his visit would be a short one. "Has anyone here seen a Shoshone brave in full war dress?"

The women and men shook their heads. Floating Cloud asked, "Has he been seen near here?"

"No," the officer said. "He hasn't been seen by anyone except the trader, Gus Capri. But he must have gone somewhere. We're fanning out in all directions from the scene of the killing."

"Is there any motive for the killing?" Ben asked.

"None that we know of," Grant answered automatically, then seemed to realize he was speaking to a white man. "Could you identify yourself, sir, and tell me what business you have on the Wind River Reservation?"

"My name's Ben Snow. I'm traveling south through Yellowstone."

"How long will you be staying here, Mr. Snow?"

"Not more than a single night, if at all. I'm just passing through."

"Good. This is a reservation for Shoshone, Arapahoe, and other tribes. It's not a way station for gunfighters."

Ben studied the man with a narrow gaze. "Do I look like a gunfighter to you, Captain Grant?"

"Yes, you do, Mr. Snow." He remounted his horse. "We don't want any gunplay here. I hope you'll be on the trail again by morning."

When they were alone again, Floating Cloud said to him, "Are you leaving?"

"Sooner or later." Ben was never one to be intimidated by threats.

"I am going to the Bull Lake area to search for my father. If he is there, he needs help. Will you ride with me?"

"Yes—on one condition."

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"What is that?"

"If you'll tell me the entire truth about your father and Sacajawea's gold, and the halfbreed who was killed."

"I'll tell you what I know as we ride. I want to get there while some daylight remains for me to search."

So they were on the trail once more, heading south through the reservation lands. Soon the villages became more numerous and a few trading posts were visible at crossroads.

"My father is a strong man," Floating Cloud began, "a warrior. He always prided himself on his independence. Even when my mother died during the battles at Wounded Knee and he saw himself doomed to living in a reservation with the rest of the tribe, he did not show resentment so much as a determination to put things right for my brother and me. He got Swift Eagle interested in building cabins for us, cabins like the white men have, and he wanted me to attend the Indian school. But in ways he converted too fast to the white man's quest for riches. We all knew Sacajawea's stories about guiding Lewis and Clark, and about her payment in gold, but once she was dead and buried the rest of us thought little more about it."

"You said earlier it was Gus Capri who told your father about the cabin in Yellowstone Park."

"That is true. I do not know when to trust Old Gus. He seems to be an honest man, but there are those who say he has cheated my people. What did he hope to gain by sending my father off to that cabin?"

"I don't know," Ben admitted. "What about Kinderland?"

"The son of a European man and a Shoshone squaw. He always belonged with the white man, not with us. But Old Gus took a liking to him, and sometimes they would go off together in search of gold and silver."

"Like Sacajawea's gold?"

"I don't know."

"Why did you think your father would still be at that cabin after two months?"

"Because my brother said he was dead and I feared he had found his body there and was afraid to tell me. Now I do not know what to think."

They rode farther south and presently came to Bull Lake and the burial mounds. Floating Cloud saw her brother speaking with a group of bare-chested young braves. He greeted her as she rode up. "None of them have seen the painted warrior on horseback."

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"Have they seen our father?"

"Walking Bear is dead. You must believe it, little one."

"He is alive!" she insisted. "The quiver—"

"Because you found his empty quiver on the floor of a deserted cabin proves nothing. We know he was alive two months ago, but I tell you he is dead now."

Floating Cloud took a deep breath. "Brother, he is alive. It was Walking Bear who slew the halfbreed. Old Gus recognized him."

"What? Why would he not tell me?"

"Perhaps he wished to give hope to me rather than to argue with you. He knows what he saw."

"In a moment of battle, many things are confused. He saw a man on horseback, that is all."

"Walking Bear is somewhere near, watching us at this moment," Floating Cloud said. "I can sense it."

Her brother turned to stare off at the surrounding woods. "There is no one."

Floating Cloud gave a little sigh. "What was Kinderland doing here with Old Gus?"

"They were digging, or at least Kinderland was—see here, by the burial mounds."

They moved their horses forward.

"The earth is still stained with his blood," Swift Eagle said.

"Did Sacajawea ever say where she had hidden the pouch of gold?" Ben asked.

"She said she would take it with her to the grave," Swift Eagle told him.

"But she's not buried here."

"She was going to be," Floating Cloud told him. "The burial spot was changed at the last minute when the Army gave permission for a special monument to her near the village of Wind River."

"If your father's alive, might he have gone there?" Ben asked.

"But why would he?"

"For the same reason he came here—to find the gold."

"It's growing dark," Swift Eagle said. "We should wait here until morning for travel."

They found a family nearby that had just moved into a new cabin and had an empty tepee they could use for the night. It was still cool after sundown, so Swift Eagle lit a fire to warm their sleeping

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quarters. Ben slept restlessly, dreaming of a Shoshone warrior charging him on horseback.

A noise in the tepee wakened him with the first light of dawn and he saw Floating Cloud's brother slipping into his fringed pants and shirt.

"Are you leaving?" Ben asked quietly, so as not to wake Floating Cloud.

"She searches for something she will never find," Swift Eagle told Ben. "Our father is dead." He lifted the flap of the tepee and started off toward his horse.

Ben dozed for a while longer and then started making breakfast. The Indian family sent their son with two fresh eggs and he fried them over the fire. Floating Cloud awakened before he had finished. "Where is my brother?"

"He has ridden off. He didn't want to disturb you."

She rubbed the sleep from her eyes and went outside, returning in a few moments to seat herself crosslegged on the opposite side of the fire. "I slept well. I never heard him leave. And now you have fixed us breakfast."

"I'm used to it. I spend most of my life on the trail."

"Do you not have a home?"

"Not really. Not in a long time."

"No wife? No children?"

"I've never gotten around to it, somehow."

"How old are you? Thirty?"

"Thirty-two. There's still plenty of time." Even as he said it, he remembered how little time there had been for others he'd known.

"Have you ever killed a man?"

Ben stared at her before he said, "Why do you ask?"

"The soldier called you a gunfighter."

"I've shot a few in self-defense," Ben told her.

She nodded as if she understood it all. Then, from outside, came the sound of a wagon on the trail. Floating Cloud jumped up and opened the flap of the tepee. "It's Gus with his buckboard!"

Ben followed her outside. There were some questions he wanted to ask Old Gus.

"Your father's alive," Gus was telling the girl. "He's been seen by others, too, riding in the distance in his war paint."

"My father rides a grey stallion."

"That's the horse," Old Gus affirmed.

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But Ben had some questions for the grizzled trader. "You sent Walking Bear to that cabin in Yellowstone. Why? Sacajawea told people before she died that the gold coins were hidden on this reservation."

"The cabin is from here," Capri said. "Its walls and roof were built here and I lugged it up to Yellowstone myself. The government paid me to put it together and I brought a couple of braves with me to do the heavy work. I guess they were goin' to use it for a forest ranger but they never did."

"How long ago was this?"

"Nine, ten years. The old squaw was still alive."

"Why did you think she would have hidden the gold in the pieces of a cabin that was to be taken a hundred miles away?"

The old man was flustered now. "I don't know. I thought—"

"Who put you up to it, Gus?"

The old trader hesitated a moment and then answered, "I guess it was Kinderland."

"Go on," Floating Cloud urged.

"He always had a crazy idea about finding that gold," Gus told them. "He said once Sacajawea was dead, it didn't belong to anyone except the person who found it. Well, there was one other person searching for the gold, and that was your father, Floating Cloud. Kinderland was convinced she'd buried the coins at the site of her future grave because she'd said something once about taking it with her to the next world—a teacher had told her the Egyptians used to be buried with their most valuable possessions in the pyramids. Kinderland wanted to dig at the burial mounds, but he had to get your father off the reservation first so he wouldn't steal the gold from Kinderland after he dug it up. Kinderland remembered the cabin in Yellowstone and got me to persuade your father the gold might be there."

"That doesn't make sense," Ben objected. "Walking Bear left the reservation two months ago and Kinderland was just digging today."

"He started digging a few days ago. He couldn't do it earlier because the soldiers had him locked up in jail for drinking and fighting."

Ben felt a surge of excitement in his veins. "Let me get this straight. Kinderland went to jail right after Walking Bear left for Yellowstone?"

"Yes—I think it was the next day. When he got out and Walking

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Bear still hadn't returned, we figured something had happened to him. That was when Kinderland started digging."

"And Walking Bear suddenly appeared to kill him."

"Sure enough! I saw it myself."

"What if I told you Walking Bear was dead, like his son's been saying all along?"

"Then I musta seen a ghost."

"Or nothing at all," Ben suggested.

"*Somebody* sure killed him. Are you sayin' I did it? Hell, I couldn't have tackled that young guy with the spear—he'd have broken me in two. Besides, why should I want to kill him? He was just wearin' himself out diggin' all those holes."

"What do you mean?" Floating Cloud asked.

"Sacajawea wouldn't have hidden the gold near the burial mounds—she knew she wouldn't be buried there. I heard that officer, Captain Grant, tell her before she died that they had a special place reserved for her down near Wind River. He even took her down to see it once."

"Wind River!" Floating Cloud turned to Ben. "If my father is really looking for the gold, he may have gone there—to Sacajawea's monument!"

The small monument that marked the grave of the Shoshone guide had already grown high with grass and there was no sign of any recent digging. Gus Capri had followed Ben and Floating Cloud with his buckboard and pulled up just when Ben was wishing he had some digging tools. "Got a shovel here on the wagon," Old Gus said.

Ben took it and studied the area around the monument. There was a large old pine tree some twenty feet away, the tallest in the area, and it seemed likely this was the landmark Captain Grant had shown to Sacajawea. Had he told her about this place, hoping she would bury her gold for him to recover?

Suddenly Ben dropped the shovel. He was remembering Walking Bear's blue quiver, and something else. "What fools we've all been," he told them. "Ninety-seven-year-old women don't go out with shovels and dig holes. If Sacajawea hid the gold here, it's above ground—under a stone, or in a hollow tree." He walked closer to the pine tree, noticing a split on one side of the trunk, possibly from a bolt of lightning in the distant past. His fingers went into it, touching, exploring, feeling something deep inside that might have been a leather pouch.

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Then he heard Floating Cloud's scream.

Ben turned quickly to see a lone horseman charging out of the woods. Gus Capri stood frozen to the spot. "That's him!" he managed to cry. "Just like yesterday—"

It was a Shoshone warrior in full war paint and battle gear, complete with the feathered headdress of a chief. "It's my father," Floating Cloud said, mesmerized, walking forward to intersect the path of the charging horse. "It's Walking Bear."

"Keep back, Floating Cloud!" Ben yelled in warning, but she kept walking.

"It's my father. He won't harm me."

"*Stop!*" Ben yelled again.

She stood there, waiting for the charging warrior to reach her, waiting for the spear that had been lowered to kill again.

At the last instant, when there was nothing else to be done, Ben drew his six-gun and fired two shots. The warrior fell to the ground, still gripping the horse's reins.

"Father!" Floating Cloud screamed, running forward.

"It's not your father," Ben told her, rushing to grab her before she reached the body. "It's your brother, Swift Eagle."

He had died at once, and in death the war feathers had fallen from his head. Ben wiped away enough of the paint so that Floating Cloud could see it was indeed her brother. "But where is my father?" she asked, not comprehending.

"Dead," Ben answered sadly. "I don't know where, but almost certainly dead. Probably buried in Yellowstone, or dropped down one of those geyser holes."

She buried her face in her hands.

"I'm very sorry, Floating Cloud. I'm sorry to tell you this. And I'm sorry I had to shoot your brother. But there was no other way."

"You knew it was him?"

"Not until a few minutes ago when I remembered something he'd said. You told him that we found your father's quiver and that it proved he'd reached the cabin. Later Swift Eagle said that an empty quiver on the floor of a deserted cabin proved nothing. How did he know we found it on the floor? It might have been outside the cabin, or on a table or a chair inside. It might have been hanging from a wall hook. Swift Eagle knew it was on the floor because he remembered leaving it there when he carried your father's body away. Later he was afraid to go back for it. I think the guilt he felt was

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what caused him to insist that Walking Bear was dead. He wanted to tell you the truth but couldn't quite bring himself to do it."

"Why would he dress up in our father's war bonnet and paint?"

"In some twisted way he'd become your father when he killed Kinderland—when he tried to kill us just now. I should have known it had to be Swift Eagle. Who else but Walking Bear's own son could look that much like him, and ride his horse, and fool someone like Old Gus?"

"But why did he kill our father? Why did he kill Kinderland? To protect the gold or get it for himself?"

"That's something we'll never know."

The facts were reported to Captain Grant, of course, and Ben remained with Floating Cloud until her brother was buried. As he mounted Oats to ride away, she asked, "Could I come with you? There is no one for me here now."

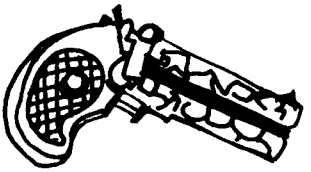
"You will find someone, Floating Cloud."

"But—"

"When I pass this way again, I'll stop to visit you."

He held her hand until she released the pressure, then he rode away.

Later, back at the grave of Sacajawea, he stopped to examine the pouch he'd felt in the split of the pine tree. The treasure she'd guarded all those years consisted of three ten-dollar gold pieces. To Sacajawea it had been a fortune. Ben carefully returned them to their hiding place before he continued riding south.



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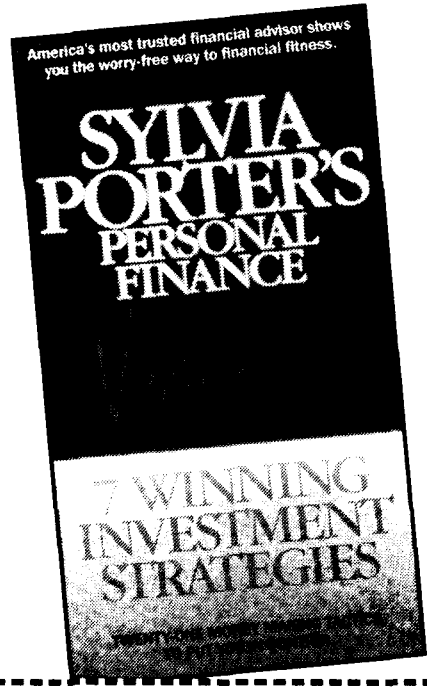
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BERTON ROUECHÉ

Berton Roueché is perhaps best known for his work published in The New Yorker, *including his widely acclaimed Annals of Medicine series which began in 1947 and continues to this day. Some of the earlier articles, called by Lewis Thomas "unofficial textbooks for medical students, interns, practitioners, scientists, and for that matter anyone interested in human illness," were first reprinted in the collection,* Eleven Blue Men, *which won a special Raven from the Mystery Writers of America in 1954. Since then, two comprehensive collections* The Medical Detectives, Volumes I and II, *have been published—in hardcover by Times Books, in paperback by Washington Square Press. Walter Clemons in* Newsweek *has called him "one of the best journalists alive."*

No slouch at fiction, either, is Mr. Roueché, as you know if you've read either of his harrowing novels, Feral *or* The Last Enemy. *The following stories, which originally appeared in* The New Yorker, *give us further insight into, in one case, the emotions that make murder and, in the other case, the lack of emotion that makes murder . . .*

THE LUG WRENCH

by BERTON ROUECHÉ

"Oh, *no,*" Gail said.

"It sure feels like it," I said, and shut off the engine.

I got out on the edge of the road and walked around to the back. It was the right rear, and it looked as if somebody had been at it with a knife. It was halfway off the rim. Gail had followed me back. She stood there in the weeds, looking down at the tire.

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"Oh, no," she said.

"It isn't as bad as all that," I said. "I can change a tire."

"I know," she said. "But—I just wish it hadn't happened. We were making such good time."

"So do I," I said. "But I told the Petersons around seven, and it isn't even six yet. We're okay." I tried the handle on the trunk. "Be a good girl and go get me the keys."

A pickup truck went by, going fast. There was an outboard motor clamped to the tailgate. I watched the truck disappearing up the road. The road ran for about a mile between potato fields and a pasture overgrown with cedars, and then cut down to a creek. Beyond the creek, about five miles back, was Loomis. Loomis was where we had turned off the highway. Up ahead was another mile of fields climbing up to a wooded ridge and the junction with Route 17. Gail came back with the keys and I opened the trunk.

"Is *that* the spare?" she said. "That old thing?"

"It's good enough to get us there," I said.

I gave her my jacket, rolled up my sleeves, and tried the lug that held the tire in its frame. The lug was loose enough to turn. I worked it off the bolt and picked up the tire and bounced it down and leaned it against the bumper. It had a good, hard bounce. I got out the jack and got down on my knees and got it under the bumper. It was a good thing I was just wearing chinos. My suit was in my bag. I hiked the jack a couple of notches with my finger, and got up and went back to the trunk for the lug wrench. It wasn't there.

"That's funny," I said.

"What's the matter?" Gail said.

"I can't find the lug wrench. You know—to hoist the jack and unscrew the lugs. It isn't here. It's gone."

"Are you sure?"

"Give me a cigarette," I said. "Of course I'm sure. It's gone."

"How could it be?"

"I don't know." I lighted the cigarette. "Maybe somebody at the garage—"

"Jack," she said, "what are we going to do?"

"I can't change a tire without a lug wrench," I said.

"But what are we going to do?"

"I'll just have to borrow one. I'll get one of these cars to stop and let me use their wrench."

"Oh," Gail said. Then her face changed. "But suppose nobody stops? Jack—this is terrible."

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"Hush," I said. I put on my jacket and brushed off the knees of my pants. "I'll get somebody to stop. We'll be okay."

The road was empty in both directions. We stood there and waited. I finished my cigarette and ground it out in the blacktop rubble at the edge of the road. I tried not to worry. This wasn't a deserted road. It always carried a certain amount of traffic.

"I think I see a car," Gail said.

I saw it, too. It was coming down the ridge, and I could see the windshield shining through the trees. We watched it come out of the woods—it seemed to be moving very slowly, and then all of a sudden it was almost on us. It was a blue station wagon with two women in front and a little boy in back. I stepped out in the road and waved my arms. It didn't stop. The little boy turned his head and stared, but the women looked straight ahead.

"Well," I said.

Gail didn't say anything.

"Those were women," I said. "I wouldn't really expect a woman to stop."

Another car came down through the woods and two cars moving close together came over the rise from the creek. The second of the two cars was a telephone-company truck. All three cars were going fast and all of the drivers were careful not to look at me. None of them stopped.

Gail went up to the front of the car and came back with her sweater. The sun was still well up in the sky beyond the creek, but the feel of the air had changed. It had the feel of evening. I looked at my watch. It was almost six-thirty. We had been here almost half an hour. A big trailer truck went by, and then another car. The car was an old sedan with big tailfins and racing stripes, and the driver was a boy with a girl in the crook of his arm.

"That makes six," Gail said.

"I don't know what else we can do."

"I know," she said. "But what happens when it gets dark?"

"It isn't dark yet."

"We could be here all night."

"Somebody will stop," I said.

A car came down from the ridge. We stood and waited and waved and watched it go by. "Well," I said, "that makes it seven."

"And the one after that will be eight," Gail said. She looked at me. "Jack, I've got an idea. What if I tried it alone? Maybe a man would stop for me. I mean, for a girl."

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"I know what you mean," I said.

Gail smiled. "All right. But, seriously, what do you think?"

"I think you're probably right," I said. "I think it's a good idea."

"You do?" She took a deep breath. She pulled down her sweater and straightened her skirt. "You really think it might work?"

"I think it's a good idea," I said.

"At least I could try and see."

"That's right."

"Then get out of sight," she said. "Go get in the car."

"Okay."

I went up, got under the wheel, and slid down low in the seat. I slid down as low as I could. I'm six feet one, but I managed to get my head pretty well out of sight. I could just see over the top of the dashboard. The road up ahead was empty. I reached out and adjusted the side mirror to give me a view of the road behind. The rearview mirror on the windshield was blocked by the lifted lid of the trunk.

Gail was standing just off the blacktop with one hand cupped on her hip. In the sharp evening light, her hair looked almost red. She was really quite a sight. I saw her tense and turn. A car was coming from up ahead.

I slid down lower and listened. I heard the car come up—and go by. But that didn't prove anything. Maybe the driver was a woman.

The next car came from the other direction. In the mirror I watched it coming and Gail stepping out, her red hair blowing, and waving her hand. The car came up and slowed, moved on, and then slowed again and swung off the road. It was a green Mustang convertible with a broken back bumper and a rip in the top patched with tape. It backed up along the shoulder and stopped about a car length ahead.

A man got out. He had short blond hair and he had on a longshoreman's jersey and an old green Air Force windbreaker. He looked about twenty-five. Gail came running past my window. She didn't look at me. I slipped back down in the seat as low as I could get.

I lay there and listened. I could hear them talking, but I couldn't hear what they said. I heard the man laugh. Then nothing. Then I heard a car door slam. Then they were talking again. It was uncomfortable hunched there under the wheel and I wondered what they were talking about so long—what the man was talking about. I could hear Gail's voice every now and then, but the man was doing the talking. He laughed again. But it wasn't exactly a laugh this

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time. It was more like a grunt or a snort. Then Gail said something and I heard them coming my way.

They came down along the shoulder of the road. I turned a little and raised my head. They were walking single file, with Gail in the lead and the man a step or two behind her, swinging a hammer-headed lug wrench. I started to sit up—and my heart gave a jump. Behind the man was another man. He was about the age of the other, and he had a round, pink, smiling face, and he wore glasses. He had a can of beer in his hand. I watched him go by. I felt a little funny. But he looked all right. They both looked all right. And it had worked. Gail had got us a lug wrench.

I opened the door, got out, and walked on back and around. The three of them were standing with Gail backed up against the side of the car. She had a kind of frozen smile on her face. They heard me coming, and the two men turned. I smiled and nodded and said hello. They stared at me.

"Oh," Gail said. She sounded out of breath. "This is my husband."

The man with the lug wrench looked at her.

"Yeah?" he said, and looked at me again. He put a cigarette in his mouth, lighted it, and blew out a stream of smoke. There was beer on his breath and his eyes were bright and shiny. "And where you been all this time?"

The other man gave a laugh. "I know where he's been," he said. "He was hiding in the car, Les. I thought I saw something setting in there when we come by." He took a drink of his beer. "Ain't that right, fella?"

"Yes," I said. "That's right. I—"

"How about that, Les? He was hiding in their car."

"Yeah," Les said.

"I'm sorry, boys," Gail said. "I'm afraid it's all my fault. I'm afraid I played a trick on you."

"Yeah?" Les said. "What kind of trick was that?"

"I guess I sort of gave you the impression I was all alone."

"Yeah," Les said. "And now you're sorry."

"She don't sound sorry," the other man said. "Not real sorry. Does she, Les?"

"You know what I mean," Gail said. "I only meant—"

"Never mind, Gail," I said. "They know what you mean." I turned to Les. "Look—it's getting late. Let's be serious. You know what happened. We had this flat tire and somebody seems to have swiped

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my lug wrench. I'm sure my wife told you all that. So I tried to flag somebody down and borrow his wrench, but nobody stopped and—well, my wife thought maybe she might have better luck."

"She did, huh?" Les said.

"Yes. So she—and then you were nice enough to stop."

Les smiled. "You got a cute-looking wife."

"Real cute," the other man said.

"My wife told you she was sorry," I said. "And I'm sorry, too. But you can understand how we felt. We were stuck here and it was getting late. We had to do something."

"We could have been here all night," Gail said.

Les dropped his cigarette between his feet and ground it out with his heel. He was wearing Wellington boots. He looked at the other man. "You know something, Billy?" he said. "I wonder if she really is his wife. I think she's too cute-looking."

"She said she was," Billy said.

"She said a lot of things," Les said. "Didn't you, Red?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Gail said. "And don't call me Red."

"Goddamn!" Billy laughed. "Listen to that redhead temper."

"Yeah," Les said. "That's another thing I like about her."

"All right," I said. "That's enough. Cut it out."

Les turned his head and looked at me.

"Look," I said. "This isn't getting us anywhere. Why don't you just give me that lug wrench and let me change this tire. Then we can all be on our way."

"Give?" Les said. "You want me to *give* you my wrench?"

"Okay," I said. "I want to borrow your wrench."

He smiled. "Say 'please.' "

"Oh, for God's sake."

He laughed. "I was just kidding," he said. "Here—you want to use my wrench, take it."

He held out the wrench. I reached to take it and he snatched it back. He smiled and shook his head. "You forgot to thank me."

I stood there for a moment.

Then I shrugged. "Okay," I said—and I lunged. He tried to move, but he wasn't ready. I got a grip on the wrench and gave it a fast backhand twist and he couldn't hold it. He let it go and stepped forward and kicked me in the shin. I stumbled and fell and went down on one knee. I saw him coming at me again and I swung the wrench. I felt it hit and heard the crack of bone.

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He took a long sliding step and sat down hard on the grass. Something moved behind me. I remembered Billy, and turned. But it wasn't Billy. It was Gail, with her mouth hanging open. Billy was up the road, running for their car. I turned back to Gail. Her mouth was still hanging open and she was staring down at Les. He lay on his back looking up with an empty look on his face, and there was blood running out of his ear.

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THE KEY

by BERTON ROUECHÉ

Somebody was scratching at the door of my room. It was full night now, but it couldn't be late. It didn't have that feel to it. I lay on my bed and listened. He scratched again. Then I heard him dancing around in the hall. And then he coughed, and the way he coughed I knew right off who it was. I knew it was Dolly. But I didn't say a word. I didn't even roll over on my back and look. I still had a good buzz on, and it didn't seem worthwhile. I just lay there and waited for him to give it up and go. When a man gets himself a room, it don't have to be big or anything. It's his own. It's private. He don't have to open up to every son that happens to come along.

I lay there feeling my buzz and waited. I listened to him coughing and dancing around. He coughed and coughed, and when he finally stopped I thought to myself that now he would surely go, but he didn't. Instead, he tried the door. I heard him turn the knob. I heard it give and the door come open, and I couldn't hardly believe my ears. I heard him coming across the floor. I couldn't understand how it happened. Unless I must of gone and forgot to lock the door. I guess that was probably the reason. I must of come in so high I just didn't think to take out my key and lock it. But even so, that didn't give him any right. It was still my room.

He was quiet for a minute. I listened for him with all my strength. I never knew it so quiet. It was like he was listening, too. Then he moved again.

"Heyo," he said.

It was Dolly, sure enough. I know that voice of his. And it sounded like he was right alongside of my bed. That made it easy for me. All I had to do was roll over and sit up and I could tell him off right to his face. I couldn't help but smile. He was going to get some surprise when he saw me rear up. I began to plan what I wanted to say.

"Heyo," he said.

I could hear him breathing now. That's another reason I knew it was Dolly—that whistle he's got when he breathes. He put out his hand and touched me. I felt his hand on my shoulder. I felt him

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shake me. I don't know why he had to go and do that. It ruined everything. I was just about ready to tell him off and that shake shook the words right out of my head. I made up my mind if he shook me one more time I'd make him sorry he had. He didn't, though. It was like he had some inkling. He didn't even try. He took his hand off my shoulder and reached down under the blanket and into the pocket of my sweater. The dirty son! Then he tried the pocket of my pants. I started to sit up, but I never made it. A wave come rolling over me.

The next thing I remember it was morning. The minute I opened my eyes, I had a feeling that something was wrong, but I wasn't just sure what. I knew I'd had a good buzz on. I'd been up to the clinic and sold me a pint of blood, and the wine always hits me extra hard after that. I got up and put on my shoes and looked around the room. It seemed to me there was something on my mind about the door. But the door looked just like always. I thought about that for a little. Then I went over to the door and tried it, and it wasn't locked. Everything come back to me then. I real quick felt in my pocket. My big clasp knife was still there. I started to breathe easy—and then I remembered the truth. That was the side I was laying on. I reached in my other pocket. It was empty. My money was gone, and so was my key. He'd took the key to my room!

I begun to shake. I walked over to the window and looked down at the alley. The white-toed cat from the barber college next door was laying there in the early sun. I cracked my knuckles and tried to quieten my nerves. I didn't mind the money too much. It was only about eighty-five cents. Mr. Buford at the Cherokee Bar had the rest of my clinic money. I give him something to keep it for me, like I do when he cashes my pension check. But the key was different. There's a world of difference. That key was mine.

Then a thought come into my mind. It hit me all of a sudden that maybe Dolly didn't aim to take my key. Maybe it just come along in his hand with the money and he never even knew it. Maybe all I had to do was find him. If I told him never mind about the money, maybe he'd be glad to give it back. But first I had to shave. I had twenty years in the Coast Guard and that's one of the things it learned me. It give me the habit of shaving every morning. The other thing it give me was a liking for my own.

I got my soap and towel and razor out of the drawer and went upstairs where the bathroom is, and I had the luck to get right in.

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That don't very often happen, and I took it for a sign. But when I come back down and was ready to leave and there wasn't anything I could do but only just shut the door of my room, I begun to shake again. It purely made me sick.

I took my cap and shut the door as tight as I could and went down the stairs to the street. The hotels had all let out already and the street was full of fellows. A couple of fellows was hunched up back in the alley and they had a bottle out. I stopped and looked, but neither one of them was Dolly. There was another bunch in front of the liquor store waiting for it to open. One of them was that broken-nosed fellow they call Shep. He and Dolly was buddies once, so I give him a sign.

"Heyo," he said.

"I was looking for Dolly," I told him. "You seen him anywheres?"

"Dolly?" he said.

"That's right," I said. "You seen him?"

"Not since last night," he said.

"When was that?"

"I don't know," he said. "Around about eleven-thirty. He was over to the Lucky Dollar drinking at the bar."

"He must of had some money," I said.

"I reckon so."

"That's what I thought," I said.

I went on up the block to the Cherokee Bar. They give you a cup of coffee in the morning there, and I also had to see Mr. Buford about some money. I sure wasn't going to see that eighty-five cents again. The Cherokee was full of fellows coming in and out, but I found a place and had me some coffee. I sat there thinking until the room cleared out a little. Then I moved over to the bar and give Mr. Buford a sign, and he come smiling up. I told him I needed some money.

"Sure thing, Josh," he said. "A dollar? Dollar and a half?"

"Better make it two," I said.

"Sure thing," he said.

He opened his book and wrote some figures in it, and then dug into his pocket. He counted me out my money on the bar.

"And a drink of whiskey," I said.

Mr. Buford smiled and reached for the bottle. I waited for him to fill the glass and take his fifteen cents and go. I never needed a drink so bad. Every time I let myself think, I could see some son walking into my room and making himself at home. I could see him

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hanging his hat on my hook and sitting down on my bed and looking out of my window, and it give me the sickest feeling. It made me sick to my stomach. I drunk my drink and called Mr. Buford back and had him pour me another. That one hit me pretty good. I could feel it. But it didn't really help.

I don't know how long I stood there. Maybe half an hour. Then I happened to turn my head to the window—and there was Dolly. He was across the street and down the block, but he wasn't too far to catch. I scrabbled up my money and moved. When I come out the door, he was standing on the corner like he couldn't make up his mind. I crossed over and give him a call. He heard me. He couldn't help but hear me. But he didn't even look around. He just begun to run.

I took right out after him. There wasn't much chance he could get away. He was faster than me, but he had that cough. Sooner or later that would slow him up. And sure enough—halfway down the block he begun to weave and waver. He come stumbling to a stop in front of Jack's G.I. Surplus Store. I was almost on him before he saw me.

He wheeled and took off again, but this time he didn't get far. He started to cross the street and then cut back and ducked into the barber-college alley. I saw him trip on the sewer grating there and go down on his knees, and that was the end of his run. When I come up, he was humped against the building wall with his mouth hanging open and his eyes rolled back in his head.

"Take your time," I told him. "Catch your breath. Then give me back my key."

He opened his eyes and give me a look.

"I want my key," I said.

He give a kind of moan.

"You heard me," I said.

He shook his head.

"You dirty son," I said. "You took the key to my room. I want it back."

I brought out my knife and opened it up to the pig-sticker blade. "Now do you hear me?" I said.

That seemed to change his mind. He backed away and begun to fumble in his pocket. Then all of a sudden his arm flung up and something small and shiny glistered through the air. It clinked against the further wall and come skittering back across the alley

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toward the grating. I made a stab to head it off, but too late. It was gone.

Then I heard him running. The dirty, tricky little son was trying to make it up the alley. I took a run and a jump and caught him by the arm and give him a poke with my knife. He went spinning backward into the wall, and I watched him slide down and fall. That son—that dirty son. He took my key and threw it away. God darn him to hell. I felt like giving him a kick. He didn't leave me nothing.

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a *NEW* short story by

JAMES POWELL

The men of Zabelin's profession spent the greater part of their lives in the hazy beer cellars of the city, those bazaars of secret, rumor, and deceit, spy haggling with spy. Even before he gave up tobacco, Zabelin found these long bargaining sessions difficult to take. But at least he could mask his discomfort behind the thick mauve smoke which was the hallmark of the Syrian leaf. Now when he tried to survive them by sucking on peppermint drops, his colleagues looked askance, as though he wasn't taking his calling seriously.

We know, of course, about the wonderful movie, A New Leaf, *based on a story by Jack Ritchie and starring Elaine May and Walter Matthau, but this isn't the first time two fine stories have claimed the same appropriate title . . .*

A NEW LEAF

by JAMES POWELL

Late in the evening of December 31, 1901, as Karl Zabelin worked alone in his shabby bed-sitting room finishing up a sheaf of year-end reports, he was seized by a coughing fit. Crushing his cigarette in the ashtray, he attacked the smoke hanging in the light of the desk lamp with an angry, yellow-fingered hand.

Suddenly the church bells throughout the Belgravian capital struck midnight. Then and there, Zabelin swore a New Year's resolution to give up tobacco. He made this pledge to himself for reasons of health, of course—and of economy, for times were hard and his superiors had been trained to stint. In addition, Zabelin, like many a young man with no expectations, believed that success must follow

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hard work, dedication to high principle, and acts of self-improvement (like swearing off tobacco) as night follows day. But his decision had unexpected consequences.

Zabelin was a spy, a member of the espionage service of the Central European Kingdom of Berengaria, posing as a Belgravian office-supply salesman. Among his most reliable informants was the gross-headed dwarf Tobias, who leased the tobacco stand at the Metropole Hotel where Zabelin bought his daily box of Old Ziggarut, the cheap Syrian smoke to which both he and Tobias were addicted.

The dwarf had a brother, a sergeant-major in the Iron Bayonets, the crack Belgravian regiment, through whom he occasionally obtained a bit of military intelligence. For example, Tobias once gave him the design for the new army canteen that doubled as an entrenchment tool, saying simply "from one Old Ziggarut man to another." But the little man took Zabelin's defection to the nonsmoker's camp as a personal affront. There would be no more such gifts.

The men of Zabelin's profession spent the greater part of their lives in the hazy beer cellars of the city, those bazaars of secret, rumor, and deceit, spy haggling with spy. Even before he gave up tobacco, Zabelin found these long bargaining sessions difficult to take. But at least he could mask his discomfort behind the thick mauve smoke which was the hallmark of the Syrian leaf. Now when he tried to survive them by sucking on peppermint drops, his colleagues looked askance, as though he wasn't taking his calling seriously.

Perhaps the peppermint drops reminded them of Zabelin's embarrassing debut in their midst. In a beer cellar called the Black Cat a few days after his arrival, a Stygarian attache with an eyepatch had sold him at a knock-down price the combination to his embassy's safe. But the next morning as Zabelin crossed the street to report to his superiors, a horse cart passed in front of him carrying an assortment of office furniture, including a large iron Wunderbar floor safe with the coat of arms of Stygaria emblazoned on the door. The Stygarian embassy had closed up shop that very morning. (Under the Secret Protocols of Zagreb, the aging Duke of Stygaria was to cede his land to Serbia on the day his only child, a sharp-chinned beauty of fifty, married a certain haughty Serbian princeling with a sloping brow and an idiot laugh.)

If Zabelin's immediate superiors found this incident less amusing than the rest of the espionage community, they could console themselves by docking his pay to recover their money. But in time they

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came to respect the hard-nosed trading abilities the new man had inherited from his peasant, horse-trading ancestors. Zabelin had, for example, exchanged Tobias's canteen-entrenchment-tool design to the French for the Russian mobilization schedule for Sectors Five and Six. The Sector Five schedule went to the Turks for the blueprints of the new Japanese naval range finder. These Zabelin traded to the British (along with the Sector Six schedule detailing Russian mobilization on the Persian border) for the plans of the Maxis Redoubt, a fortress called The Doorstop to the Gateway to Transylvania, a key piece in the defensive puzzle on his own country's northeast frontier. So it was that Zabelin first brought himself to the attention of his superiors back home. Of course, all this was before his giving up tobacco had cost him Tobias's friendship.

On the plus side, Zabelin's heart traded its erratic quickstep for a plodding but more reassuring beat and he lost the sudden cough which could be embarrassing on covert surveillance down a quiet street. He also began to take long early-morning walks into the countryside. On one of these excursions he came upon the Belgravian Army on secret maneuvers. Sitting down by the side of the road with a group of soldiers and offering around his bag of peppermint drops, he was able to garner information which, by shrewd trading in the beer cellars that night, earned him the Medal of Diligence, Second Class.

After these country walks he often stopped for an early lunch at a rural beer garden overlooking the little islands of the Langerhans, an establishment popular with the officers of a cavalry regiment stationed in the vicinity. Over a period of time, he became acquainted with a sensitive young lieutenant who wrote verse and was a great admirer of Berengaria's literary giant, Anton Tinkler, called the Poet of the Mournful Countenance, whose couplets the schoolboy Zabelin had been obliged to commit to memory in mighty portions. This officer passed on to Zabelin whatever military information he thought might promote Belgravian-Berengarian friendship, saying simply, "From one lover of Tinkler to another."

Zabelin also became friendly with Anna, the young woman who worked behind the counter at the candy store where he bought his peppermint drops. If her face was too broad to be called beautiful and her hair too dull to be called spun gold, she was abundantly supplied with good sense and a serious view of life. One Thursday, her afternoon off, he took her for an inexpensive outing to the Military Museum.

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As it happened, Marshal de Metz, the Belgravian chief of staff, was just beginning a series of Thursday-afternoon lectures on military strategy to the officer students of the War College. Because he fancied he looked rather like the particular bust of Napoleon next to the podium of the auditorium at the Military Museum, de Metz always arranged to give his lectures there, even though that meant they were open to the public. Zabelin and Anna returned for the next several Thursday afternoons. At the conclusion of the lecture series, Zabelin was able to detail to his superiors Belgravia's strategic philosophy, which in World War I would become famous as the "Daylight Savings Time" or the "Spring Forward, Fall Back" defense.

He also took Anna for evening strolls in the park whenever a military band was playing, drawn by the fresh air and the economy of the thing. But he quickly discovered he could learn something of Belgravian military intentions in the titles of the latest band music—like the heady galop named "To the Brenta and Back by Christmas," the slow march called "The Bersaglieri's Lament," and a quick march entitled "Victory Under Tuscan Skies." In his reports home, he attributed his information to highly placed sources.

At the end of one particularly pleasant concert, when the band struck up the Belgravian national anthem and Zabelin stood with the rest, his chest swelling with counterfeit patriotism, he was swept with a deep feeling of homesickness. Then and there, he resolved to do so well in his profession that he would be recalled to Berengaria for headquarters duty. Back home he would raise a large family of non-smoking boys to follow him into the espionage service. When he told all this to Anna and, in the process, admitted he was a Berengarian spy, she said she understood his dream, adding, "As for your being a spy, I have never been interested in politics." That was the night he proposed.

Anna proved to be a loving wife and a great help in his career. She assumed the burden of his paperwork and took over the matter of his clothes, something in which he had never shown great interest. She kept the spots out of his suits and the dandruff from his shoulders and provided him with ties of a more fashionable width. Zabelin soon discovered that shooting his cuffs and fussing with the knot of his tie could occupy his hands as well as a cigarette had.

As luck would have it, Admiral Hrothman, the chief of landlocked Berengaria's espionage service—who had long believed unmarried men (possessing as they did more sail than ballast) were unsuited

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for the espionage game—chose that moment to issue an advisory to his bachelor operatives suggesting they give matrimony a long, hard look.

This directive, coming so soon after Zabelin's marriage, plus the clasp to his Order of Diligence, Second Class, for the report on Belgravia's intentions toward Italy, led Zabelin's immediate superiors to see him as a coming man, more privy than they to what was going on back at headquarters. They began to point him out to the new agents as someone to emulate.

One evening Zabelin made the rounds of the beer cellars with young Schneer in tow, searching for a man rumored to have the plans for the Portuguese armored hot-air balloon. Zabelin was supposed to give his colleague a demonstration of how deals were made. As they waited over beer at a corner table in the Black Cat, Schneer, a soft-looking chain-smoker, asked Zabelin's advice on how best to succeed in the service. Impatient to get back up on the street where he could breathe again, Zabelin said, "Stay away from places like this, with their dogeared code books and shopworn battle plans. Swear off tobacco. Smarten up your dress. Take long walks in the fresh air."

This remark was overheard by an officer with Austrian naval intelligence pretending to be sleeping in a drunken stupor at the next table. Reassigned back to Vienna a week later, the officer quoted Zabelin, to plug an awkward moment of silence in a conversation with his section chief. The section chief happened to repeat what he said to the head of Austrian intelligence, who thought enough of Zabelin's comment to issue it as instructions throughout his organization. This message, picked up and decoded by Berengarian intelligence, so impressed Admiral Hrothman that he issued the same instruction himself. Once again Zabelin's immediate superiors marveled at how he anticipated instructions from on high. They began to send back glowing reports on his activities.

Zabelin was well aware that he owed these reports, his commendable job rating, and his salary increments, small as they were, to his giving up tobacco. He told Anna that his only regret was no longer having an excuse to carry the cigarette lighter his mother and father had given him when he graduated from espionage school, an ingenious thing in silver with a small camera built in.

Anna, a great reader of novels of high society, told him that it wasn't unusual for gentlemen who didn't use tobacco to carry a cigarette lighter to be at the service of those society ladies who were

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taking up the habit. She said all he had to do was affect a more elegant image.

Elegance? Zabelin smiled and nodded. Yes, he did need a new cachet. The woods were filling up with hiking spies, all breathing deeply and stepping smartly along.

So, overnight Zabelin transformed himself from office-supply salesman to an office-supply tycoon, who made the rounds of embassy parties and other social events of the capital dressed in secondhand evening dress impeccably restored by Anna. The hunting crowd admired his eye for horse flesh. His peasantlike love of property and hard currency made him a man financiers could confide in. The ladies agreed he was attentive with his cigarette lighter. Yet elegance proved a dead-end street. Moving in his new circle, Zabelin provided his superiors with a constant flow of solid, unspectacular information, but certainly nothing to earn a posting back at headquarters.

Then Norway declared itself independent from Sweden, choosing a Danish prince to rule them as King Haakon VII. The arrival of a new nation on the world scene, a nation with borders on Sweden, Finland, and Russia to defend, set the espionage community humming. It meant new mobilization schedules, new plans of battle, new code books to be obtained by hook or by crook. But by far the most sought-after item was the design of the *King Oscar,* Norway's prototype one-man submarine of the Sardine Can class.

For Admiral Hrothman, the *King Oscar* seemed the answer to a lifelong dream. He saw an armada of tiny submarines launched into the playful little Drinka, Berengaria's national river, which reached the Danube in graceful meanders. From there, the undersea vessels could sail out into the Black Sea and slip through the Dardanelles, making his country a naval power to be reckoned with. The Admiral let it be known to his people that whoever obtained the *King Oscar* plans could name his own reward.

But in faraway Belgravia, the most Zabelin could hope to get his hands on would be a code book or two after the Norwegian ambassador took up residence. Still, that was better than nothing. Whenever he and Anna took a walk, their feet would lead them past the three-and-a-half-story townhouse on the less than fashionable street which would be the Norwegian embassy. One day he recognized two Spanish spies in a doorway nearby nudge each other, spit on their palms, and stare at the sidewalk, bobbing their shoulders as though counting the shovelfuls it would take to tunnel into the basement.

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Another time Anna squeezed his hand and nodded at the lean young German across the street limbering up his entwined fingers while he stared at the unbarred windows on the embassy's third-floor living quarters. In his imagination the young man was no doubt scaling the face of the building under the cover of darkness. Others dreamed of code books, too.

Then one day, while attending an afternoon reception at the Ministry of Commerce, Zabelin crossed the room to light the cigarette of a lady seated by the window, arriving just in time to see a horse cart pass by in the street. It carried a familiar Wunderbar floor safe, on which the Stygarian coat of arms had been replaced by the bright and fresh Norwegian one. It was the same safe. Zabelin recognized the cart horse. Surely a spanking-new country like Norway would have enough start-up expenses without paying out good money to change safe combinations.

Back at home, in an old notebook, he found the string of numbers he'd bought from the one-eyed attache. All he had to do was wait until the Norwegians stopped sending their telegraphic messages "au clair." That would signal that the new code book had arrived from Norway. Then he would make his move.

But not long after the Norwegian ambassador presented his credentials, Zabelin heard news that set his heart to racing as if back on nicotine. The Norwegians wanted a naval treaty with Belgravia. Their Foreign Minister would arrive in the capital soon, bringing with him the *King Oscar* plans as proof of his nation's intention to make itself a modern sea power.

That same afternoon, Zabelin called at the embassy on the pretext that he was considering opening an outpost of his office-supply empire in Oslo. As he reported to Anna at the dinner table, both the front-door lock and the one to the ambassador's office where the floor safe was kept were within his lock-picking skills.

The Belgravian government gave a splendid banquet in the Norwegian Foreign Minister's honor on the evening of his arrival. At the precise moment the clear soup was being served, Zabelin was standing across the street from the Norwegian embassy waiting for the janitor to complete the cleaning of the first-floor offices. Beneath the pavement he thought he heard the sound of tunneling. In the ivied shadows under the embassy's third-floor windows he thought he saw something move. Well, what did it matter? he thought—he was the only one with the combination to the safe. But his smile faded quickly. For when the janitor was done and had put everything

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away in a broom closet, he carried a straight-backed chair, a lunch bucket, and a novel with a lurid cover over to the front door vestibule and sat down as if settling in for the night.

Zabelin cursed. The man doubled as night watchman! How in blazes could he get to the safe now? But his spirits improved when he saw the janitor extract a short-stemmed briar from his pocket, a kind the British picked up from the Boers during the recent confrontation and renamed "the bulldog."

Zabelin found it strange that men never failed to bring back from the battlefield a new way to use tobacco. The English and the French found cigars while enemies in Spain during the Napoleonic Wars. The English and the French discovered the cigarette as allies under the walls of Sevastopol. In a moment the man was slapping his pockets in search of something. Was it matches, or his tobacco pouch, or a bit of apple or orange peel to keep the tobacco moist, or one of those fuzzy wires to clean the stem, or his tamper, or a knife to scrape out the dottle? The janitor jumped to his feet and hurried to the staircase, bound for his room under the eaves.

Before he was out of sight, Zabelin had crossed the street to the embassy. The front-door lock took less than a minute and a half. He reached the ambassador's private office in long, silent strides. He vanquished that lock in even less time, closing the door quietly behind him just as the janitor's returning footsteps sounded on the stairs.

By the flame of his cigarette lighter-camera, Zabelin dialed the combination to the safe. Then, offering a brief prayer to the patron saint of fiscal economy that the numbers hadn't been changed, he turned the handle. The door swung open. Zabelin found the plans for the *King Oscar* and stuffed them inside his jacket, then he went back to the office door and knelt down on one knee at the keyhole. He stayed like that for almost an hour before the janitor threw his book aside and began slapping his pockets again. What a cruel goddess tobacco was to burden her worshipers with such a cargo of sacred objects and then fog their brains so that they forget half the list, thought Zabelin as the janitor's legs disappeared up the stairs.

Out on the street again, Zabelin paused to check his watch. Though time was short, he decided to spare enough for a quick detour to the Black Cat.

Business was bad in the beer cellars these days. Only veteran spies too close to retirement to fear directives on fresh air or the evils of tobacco and beer halls dared come there any more. Among

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these, Zabelin spotted the one-eyed Stygarian who years before had sold him the combination to the safe. The man was part of the Serbian apparatus now. Zabelin moved toward him through the blue haze while from every corner men coughed and spat and wheezed like casualties of war in some dugout hospital ward.

When he sat down at the Stygarian's table and told him what he had to sell, Zabelin half expected the man to remember him and get suspicious. But he did not. Instead, the Stygarian's bloodshot good eye began to blink eagerly. The combination to the Norwegian safe was hot merchandise. They sparred over price for several minutes, the Stygarian pausing at one point and giving Zabelin a puzzled look as though trying to fish up something from his smoke-damaged memory.

But then the man shook his head briskly and made a counter offer. Zabelin accepted, knowing he could have driven the man higher if he'd had the time. Then he rose and without regret left the Black Cat for the last time, content that the numbers he had just exchanged for cash would not work when the one-eyed man came to use them. Hard times or not, when the Norwegians found the safe door ajar and the *King Oscar* plans missing, they would have to have the combination changed.

Zabelin took a cab to the railway station, where his wife was waiting for him, watching a porter load their luggage into the baggage car. They had scarcely settled into their compartment before the train pulled away from the platform and out into the starless night. The next sun they saw would be rising over Berengaria.

Zabelin was rewarded with the headquarters assignment he requested and settled down to life behind a desk. He and Anna raised a large family of girls, which, to his surprise, did not distress him at all. None smoked or married men who did. Several married men in the espionage service whose careers Zabelin assisted as best he could. But, except for the notch up that everyone got when Admiral Hrothman sailed off down the Drinka in his one-man submarine never to be seen or heard of again, advancement in the service came slowly.

Zabelin's one remaining moment of glory occurred at the outbreak of World War I, when he authored Directive Ten, instructing counter-intelligence personnel at railway border-crossings to focus their attention on clear-eyed, rosy-cheeked travelers entering the country in No Smoking compartments. Directive Ten was credited

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with having kept all enemy espionage apparatuses out of Berengaria for the duration of the war. But it cast a pall over the last years of Zabelin's life. Looking back on it, it seemed to him that he had betrayed his own people. For surely, he told himself, all non-smokers are citizens of the same country.

DETECTIVERSE

ANOTHER GRAVE TONE

by JAMES HOLDING

These are the bones of Muggs Querada,
Best blackjack dealer in all Nevada,
Who found his routine daily chore
Beginning to bore him more and more,
And was suddenly seized by a strong ambition
To better his modest cash position.
So it wasn't long till a greedy Muggs
Was dealing not only cards but drugs—
A very dangerous game to play
With the likes of a vigilant D.E.A.
And the gang of South American thugs
Who furnished the drugs that were dealt by Muggs.
For, alas, one night at his home in Reno,
After his stint at the Strip Casino,
Poor Muggs was found in a pool of gore,
Dead-certain sure to be bored no more.
He now lies here in this lonely grave,
A greedy, double-dealing knave
Who should have known that a lump of "crack"
Was harder to deal than a one-eyed Jack.

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a *NEW* short story by

DOUG ALLYN

There was a Viet Nam Veterans chapter in Onandaga and Murphy gave them a call. "I'm trying to locate a guy I knew overseas named Sterleski."

"Carl Sterleski? Or Tom?"

"I'm not sure. His wife's name was Fawn."

"Then you mean Carl. A friend?"

"Not a close friend, no. But I—promised to look him up, you know?"

"Well, no easy way to say this, Mr. Murphy," the Viet Nam Vets man, Barnett, said . . .

DEBT OF HONOR

by DOUG ALLYN

Ever notice that in the movies explosions are always shown in slow motion? The flame at the heart of the blast flares gently as a Glory in the Morning, bodies and debris pirouette in an aerial ballet to the soundtrack's muted thunder. Real explosions aren't like that. It's flash, *riiipp,* you shake like a rat in a dog's jaws, stunned and breathless. You *feel* the hammer more than hear it and your senses go metallic, filtered through shattered glass. I know about explosions. I lost part of my left arm to an NVA howitzer round near Khe Sanh in '73. But sometimes I think that particular shell must have exploded in slow motion somehow. Because all these years later, pieces of it still occasionally tumble into my life. At the damndest times.

I had my kids for the weekend. We'd done the Detroit Zoo, Toys R Us, and a double Domino's pizza back at my apartment, at which point I collapsed to watch the Tigers vs. Toronto on the tube. Toby

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and Maureen disappeared into my small basement rec room to video-game it. I thought.

Morris was pitching for the Tigers, nobody was hitting him, and I was semi-comatose by the second inning. And then Toby marched into the room wearing part of my old uniform and I exploded out of my chair, shouting, and scared us both half to death.

"I'm sorry, Dad, I didn't think you'd mind—"

"It's okay," I said, but it wasn't. I was shaking, and a deranged slide projector in my memory kept superimposing my twelve-year-old son's features over the faces of men I'd served with—friends who hadn't come home. Toby was eyeing me warily, waiting for me to run amok, I suppose, like the vets he sees on TV. "Where'd you find that stuff?" I managed at last.

"That big duffelbag, in the storeroom downstairs. Are we in big trouble?"

"No, really, it's okay. You just startled me," I said. "I, ah, forgot it was even down there."

"The clothes are pretty funky, but there's neat stuff, too—medals and pictures. Come on, I'll show you. If you promise not to freak out again."

"I can't promise that," I said deadpan. "One wrong word could put me over the edge."

"Yeah, right," he said.

"That's the word!" I yelled, and chased him down to the basement.

Maureen pretended not to hear us thundering down the stairs. At thirteen, she's far too sophisticated for such nonsense. Moe's a bit gawky, I suppose, but I can see the promise of beauty in her. Though I'd probably see it if she had two heads. Auburn hair, eyes as green as the Auld Sod's supposed to be. And, like her mother, waiting none too patiently for me to grow up.

"You never said you won any medals," she said. "Tammi Phillips did a term paper on her dad's medals and I could have topped her easy if I'd known."

"You don't win medals, hon, you just get 'em. And I didn't think you'd be interested."

"Can I have one of these shirts?" Toby asked. "Camou stuff's ice-cool in school."

"You're welcome to anything in there, but maybe we better sort through it. I'm not sure what shape it's in."

"What about this?" Maureen said archly, handing me a thin, paper-wrapped parcel. I looked it over, frowning. It was addressed to

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Mrs. Fawn Sterleski, Onandaga, MI, return address an APO box number. Saigon. And I'd never seen it before.

"Who's this—Fawn person?" Maureen asked, sounding exactly like her mother.

"I really don't know. I haven't opened this bag since I came home. Somebody must have packed it by mistake."

"Somebody?" she echoed, raising an eyebrow.

"Honey, I was in the hospital, I didn't—" *Homeboy.* I caught a blurred glimpse of someone moving through a shadow of my memory. A man in a wheelchair. *Homeboy.* Blond, pudgy. At my bedside in the hospital in Saigon. "Homeboy, right? Detroit? Hear you got a million-dollar ding in your arm. Goin' home."

We talked a while. What was his name? A blank. I'd been half zonked at the time on morphine. "Do me a favor, bro? Get this to my old lady when you get back to the world?" He put the package on my nightstand and wheeled himself out, giving me a thumbs-up from the doorway. But later that night my hand hemorrhaged. They ran me back to surgery, zipped it off, and medevacked me stateside a few days after. I came out of the fog at the Vet's facility in Grand Rapids, U.S.A. And Nam seemed surreal, a fever dream. Except that I was minus half a forearm. So I tried to forget it all, to put it behind me and get on with my life. And I'd never unpacked my duffel bag.

"What's so funny?" Maureen asked suspiciously.

"Just thinking of all the times I've griped about slow mail. And the first time somebody asks me to deliver something, I'm fifteen years late. I just hope it isn't chocolates."

Easier said than done. Ma Bell didn't have any Sterleskis listed in Onandaga, and there were too many in the 616 area to telephone, though I could try that as a last resort. I ran a credit check through the used-car lot where I work, but came up empty. No credit record. What else did I know about her? Her husband was a vet. And there *was* a Viet Nam Veterans chapter in Onandaga. I gave them a call.

"Viet Nam Vets, U.S.A. Barnett."

"Hi," I said. "My name's Murphy. I'm trying to locate a guy I knew overseas named Sterleski."

"Carl Sterleski? Or Tom?"

"I'm not sure. His wife's name was Fawn."

"Then you mean Carl. A friend?"

"Not a close friend, no. But I—promised to look him up, you know?"

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"Well, no easy way to say this, Mr. Murphy. Carl didn't make it. Sorry."

The stab of loss caught me unaware. I hadn't really known Sterleski, or thought of him in years, and now I wondered how many more I'd forgotten. "I see," I said, swallowing. "And his wife?"

"She's remarried. To a guy named Radford. Still lives around here. Their phone's not listed, but I can give you their address if you like—as long as you're not hustling cemetery plots or whatever. You here in town now?"

"No, but I—may be, in a day or so." I was surprised by my own answer.

"Stop by the VVA office if you get time. I'll buy the coffee, give you a list of local businesses owned by vets. If we don't take care of each other, who will, right? Hang on, I'll get you that address."

I had no trouble getting the day off. One of the advantages of dead-end jobs is that nobody cares if you come or go. I whiled away the four-hour drive trying to come up with a rational answer for making the trip. I'd only met Sterleski once and barely remembered him. Maybe that was reason enough. In any case, I couldn't see just dropping the package in the mail after all these years, it wouldn't be fair to his wife. Or to him. And what Barnett said kept rattling around in my head. If we don't take care of each other, who will?

Onandaga's a quiet little mill town on the Lake Michigan shore an hour north of the Indiana line—solid frame houses on generous lots, the kind you can't buy any more. Elm-shaded streets, the lake sparkling indigo to the horizon. I drove around sightseeing for an hour before I admitted to myself that I was stalling and went to the address Barnett gave me.

It was a two-car-garage, brick ranch in a quiet subdivision filled with clone homes varied only by their trim. A nurse answered the bell—thin, almost gaunt, with sandy hair pinned up beneath her white cap, narrow mouth, hard grey eyes, no makeup. Definitely not a Fawn. A Badger if anything.

"Excuse me, is Mrs. Fawn Radford at home?"

"I'm Mrs. Radford, but I'm just leaving for work, so if you're selling something—"

"No, ma'am, I'm, ah, making a delivery. A late one." I explained the situation as best I could. She heard me out without comment and frowned as she accepted the parcel, examined it, then gave it back to me.

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"Look, Mr.—Murphy, is it? I appreciate what you're tryna do here, late or not, but you've gone to a lot of trouble for nothing. This isn't for me."

"I don't understand."

"My first husband wasn't a bad guy in a lot of ways, but—he was kind of a hustler, you know? I'm not complaining, mind you—Carl left me pretty well set—but I can't accept this. You know what's in here? Medals. Not Carl's, somebody else's. He'd have a buddy drop off a box like this every few months and I'd take it over to his old boss, Charlie Haggeman, at the funeral home."

"Funeral home?"

"Looking back at it, I suppose it was a way to drum up trade or something. I don't know and honestly don't care now. And I'm gonna be late for work. Sorry. Have a nice day."

She stalked off to her station wagon without a backward glance, a lady who knew exactly what she was doing. Which was more than I could say. Good intentions turn into Situation FUBAR. The Viet Nam Story, Part II. Starring Murphy as the jerk. Again. Still, I'd come too far to just turn around and go home. And there *was* a kind of convoluted logic to the situation. If you're trying to deliver a package for a dead man, what better place than to a funeral home?

Haggeman's Mortuary was a massive two-and-a-half-story manse that looked like it had been lifted from the set of *Gone With the Wind* and dropped in the center of a four-acre lawn north of Onandaga. The size and luxury of the place seemed a bit overblown for the blue-collar town it served. Even the salesman who met me at the door was larger than life, a bodybuilder in an immaculately tailored suit, wearing an earnest, sympathetic smile and too much English Leather. I asked to see Charles Haggeman.

"I'm sorry, sir," he purred, "Mr. Haggeman is *very* busy today. I'm Mr. Rossi, perhaps I can—"

"Just tell him I have a delivery for him. From Carl Sterleski."

Rossi eyed my corduroy sportcoat doubtfully, but showed me into a tastefully subdued waiting room, overstuffed chocolate-leather chairs facing an intricately inlaid antique desk. Even the Muzak was Mozart.

Charles Haggeman entered the room quietly and eased himself into the massive chair behind the desk. He was broad and tall as a doorway, massive leonine head helmeted with a silver evangelist's pompadour, cheeks thick as mahogany slabs and nearly as dark,

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with an unhealthy purplish sunlamp tint. Wary raisin eyes peered from behind rolls of flesh. "Mr. Rossi said you have a delivery for me, Mr.—?"

"Murphy. Kevin Murphy. I have a packet for you. From Carl Sterleski."

"If this is a joke, Mr. Murphy, it's in extremely poor taste." His voice was a surprisingly high tenor, with a clotted cholesterol wheeze.

"No joke." I explained briefly. He nodded cautiously once or twice, but didn't seem particularly interested.

"I don't believe I can help you, sir. Carl did occasionally send me the personal effects of boys from the area who were killed in action. I presented them to the families with an offer of complete memorial services—gratis, of course. But since both Carl and the soldier in question are long since buried—"

"You don't want the packet, either?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it," I said evenly, rising to leave. "It's my fault. The first thing I learned in basic training was never to volunteer. Next time I'll remember."

"Mr. Murphy, just a moment, please. Were you planning to return to Detroit tonight?"

"I suppose so," I said. "Why?"

"Since you've traveled here at least partly on my account, let me make amends. I own an interest in a local motel-restaurant, The Plantation. Why don't you stay the night—dinner, drinks, whatever you like, on the house."

"I, ah—sure, why not?" I nodded. "Thanks, that's very kind of you."

"The least I can do under the circumstances. I'll notify the management. Enjoy your stay, Mr. Murphy, and my apologies for all the bother."

Haggeman was a man of his word. The manager at The Plantation gave me his best suite—king-sized bed, large-screen TV, even a Jacuzzi. A leisurely bubble bath and a quick nap restored the dregs of my faith in humanity. I scrounged a clean shirt out of my overnight case, added a tie for good measure, and went off to dinner.

The hostess treated me like an heir to the throne. Prime rib with champagne, baked Alaska, a snifter of twenty-year-old cognac. I was

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beginning to think the rewards of Good Samaritanage weren't all in the hereafter. And then I got mugged.

If that's the word for it. I was strolling back to my room, in and full of excellent spirits, when somebody seized my arms from behind and jerked me into the shadow of a custom van. Instant chokehold, my right arm jammed between my shouderblades, no chance to yell or struggle. A second guy frisked me, then gave me a body shot to the solar plexus that dropped me like a sack of cement while they hurried off. The whole thing took less than half a minute, not counting the time I spent crawling around the parking lot picking up my effects.

Everything seemed to be there, even the few bucks in my wallet. I staggered back to my room, splashed my face with cold water, then picked up the phone to call the police. And slowly put it down again. My overnight case had been rifled. When you have to dress yourself with one hand, you learn to pack things just so, and the case was disarranged. I checked, but, again, nothing seemed to be missing. So what should I tell the police? That I'd been robbed and burgled by people who didn't take anything? I'd probably end up spending the night in the drunk tank.

But if they didn't want my money or my shaving kit, what did they want? The only thing I could think of was the damned packet, and I'd been trying to give it away all day with no luck. Still, I went back to the parking lot and retrieved it from under my Buick's front seat.

Back in the room, I stripped off the yellowed paper and tossed it aside. The flimsy cardboard mailer held the effects of an Airman First Class named Schmidt, Gilbert W. A few medals, a small-arms marksmanship certificate, a Purple Heart. Priceless, if you could calculate what he'd paid for them, but not worth much to anyone but his family. Certainly not worth stealing.

I decided to take one last shot at locating Schmidt's people in the morning, and then head home. I'd done my best, but enough was enough, and I really didn't owe the late Airman Schmidt any more than the rest of the country did.

Barnett, the guy at the battered desk in the Viet Nam Vets Association storefront office, looked like a balding bear in a rumpled fatigue jacket. Steel-rimmed glasses with one dark lens camouflaged a scarred, milky eye, but there was no sense of impairment about him. He was a squat, powerful man, and a wary one. "This isn't the

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name you asked about when you called the other day," he said, examining Schmidt's effects.

"I know. The situation turned out to be a little more complicated than I'd thought." I explained what had happened. He was a good listener, nodding sympathetically in the right places, and I found myself telling him more than I'd intended to, a lot more—about my divorce, and the dozen or so jobs I'd quit since I got back to the world. I even told him about getting roughed up in the parking lot and my suspicions about my suitcase.

"The first part of your story's real familiar, bro," he said quietly when I'd finished. "A lot of us have had trouble adjusting, especially the wounded. I sure as hell did. But that business last night, what do you suppose it was about?"

"I don't know. You live here, you tell me."

"Offhand, I'd say there's somethin' goin' on. Or there was fifteen years ago, anyway."

"Something like what?"

"I'm not sure. I was in school with Sterleski, and he was a born con man, only joined up to stay outta jail. Charlie Haggeman's no prize, either, but he did do a few free burials back then. Don't think he's done one since. For what it's worth, he's got a couple of bruisers workin' for him that don't seem to do much out there. You get a look at the dudes who grabbed you?"

"Only the one who hit me. Big guy with reddish hair, freckles."

"Might be Red Duroy. He works for Haggeman, supposedly as a driver."

"But what did they want?"

"This stuff, I guess," Barnett said, tapping the mailer with a nicotine-stained fingertip. "From what you said, it's all you've got."

"But I tried to give it to Haggeman and he turned me down."

"True, but when you walked in saying you had a package from Sterleski Haggeman probably figured you were a cop. Offered you the room to keep you here long enough to check you out."

"I don't understand."

"Come on, Murphy, think about it. Sterleski coulda mailed the damn medals, but he didn't. Because he was afraid a censor would wonder what he was doin' with somebody else's effects. His wife gives 'em to Haggeman and Charlie uses 'em to con the family into lettin' him pick up the body."

"They were smuggling, weren't they?" I said slowly.

"That's my guess," he nodded.

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"Drugs, do you think?"

"China White's the only thing I heard of worth sneakin' outta Nam. But whatever it was, it's still in Schmidt's coffin, or at least Haggeman thinks it is."

"Even if that's true, there's no way to prove it's Haggeman's junk. The police would be as likely to arrest me as him."

"You're probably right," Barnett said, eyeing me coolly across the battered desk. "You know, you tried to do the honorable thing by Sterleski—it's not your fault it didn't work out. But maybe it's time to think about changin' tactics."

"I'm not sure I follow."

"You see any combat in Nam? I mean real combat?"

"I didn't get this cheating at pinochle," I said, showing him the plastic mock-up of my left hand. "Why?"

"So that's your war souvenir, and this dump is all I got," he said, taking in the shabby office with a sweep of his arm, "while Charlie Haggeman made himself rich off dead G.I.s. I figure maybe he owes us a debt, Mr. Murphy, a piece of the action. If we can figure a way to collect it. What do you think?"

"If he's really in the drug trade, I think it sounds risky," I said.

"Yeah," Barnett nodded, the first time I'd seen him smile. "I think you're right. But the way things have been goin', it's not like either one of us has a whole lot to lose."

"No," I admitted, "maybe not. So, ah, what have you got in mind?"

The next day Barnett dropped me off a block from the funeral home and I jogged the rest of the way. Rossi, the ironpumper, eyed me suspiciously when I trotted in wearing a fishnet T-shirt, running shorts, and tennies, but I brushed past him, hammered once on Haggeman's office door, and walked in without waiting for an invitation.

Haggeman hit a button on his desk as soon as he saw me, and a guy in blue-denim coveralls charged into the room before I'd gone three steps. And any doubts I'd had vanished. It was my freckled friend from The Plantation parking lot, Duroy, holding a shotgun leveled at my midsection. I raised my hands. "Good morning, gentlemen," I said, turning a slow pirouette in the center of the room. "Sorry I'm a little underdressed for a business call but, as you can see, I'm unarmed and I'm not wearing a wire."

"What the hell—" Duroy began, but Haggeman cut him off with a wave of his hand.

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"Let me say my piece," I said quickly, "we don't have much time. I've got a name for sale, Charlie, of a vet who's buried here in the Onandaga Cemetery. I want twenty thousand for it. Today. I'll meet you at the cemetery this afternoon. You show me the money, I give you the name. You can exhume the body on the spot. Your guys work around there all the time, nobody'll question it. If your merchandise is in the box, you give me the money and I walk away. If not, no payment."

"Maybe you'll tell us the name now if we ask you right," Duroy said, moving around between me and the door.

"You'll have to ask me quick," I said, "because if I don't walk out of here alone in the next sixty seconds my buddy goes straight to the police. Same deal this afternoon—if I don't walk away as soon as the box is open he'll go to the cops before you can split. Which is why I want you there, Charlie—for insurance. If you're not there, no deal."

"Why this afternoon?" Haggeman said calmly. "What's the hurry?"

"Because I know I'm out of my league. You're pros, and if I leave you any room to maneuver at all you'll figure a way to rip me off. So how about it?" I checked my watch. "The clock's running."

He made a bridge of his fleshy, neatly manicured fingertips, eyed me across it for half a lifetime, and then nodded slowly. "All right, Mr. Murphy, this afternoon, at five. But you'd better understand something. If there's any trouble, and I mean any at all, you'll be the deadest person in that cemetery. I'll have nothing to lose. Do you understand?"

"If there's one thing I know about, it's losing," I said. "I won't jerk you around. You just bring the money. Now if you'll excuse me, I've really got to run."

The sky had gone gunmetal-grey, bringing an early dusk and a threat of distant thunder, when I jogged through the cemetery gate at five. Haggeman, Rossi, and Duroy were waiting in the veteran's section, wearing matching denim coveralls and lounging around a red-and-grey Ford tractor with a multi-shovel trenching attachment to the rear. Charlie was in the driver's seat, tensely scanning the area with binoculars, but other than the thousand-odd sleepers underground we were alone. "You're late," he said, continuing his sweep. "Show him the money, Red." Duroy picked up a black metal lunchbucket and opened the lid.

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I quickly rifled through the banded bundles of hundreds and nodded. "Over there," I said, pointing to a grave a row away, "the name's Schmidt, Gilbert W., U.S.A.F."

Haggeman fired up the tractor without a word and backed it expertly to Schmidt's grave. The engine slowed to a snarl as he engaged the trench-hoe and slammed it into the sod, the tractor bucking and shuddering as the chain-driven shovels chewed the grave open a mouthful at a time. In ten minutes, the trench was nearly five feet deep and the blades struck sparks as they grated against the concrete vault. Duroy and Rossi finished clearing the lid with spades, then hooked a length of chain to the Ford's hydraulic winch and Haggeman raised the lid clear. I winced as Duroy popped the coffin lid with a jimmy bar, but there were no spectral groans, no reek of decay. The green rubberized body-bag was intact, technology's final, futile skirmish with the natural order of things.

Duroy fumbled around beneath the bag and came up with a half dozen foil-wrapped packets and tossed them up to Rossi while Haggeman continued to scan the horizon with his binocs. Then Duroy scrambled out, brushed himself off, and, at Haggeman's nod, jerked a silenced automatic from inside his shirt and jammed the muzzle against my chest.

"Hey, wait a minute!" I gasped. "You can't—"

"Shut your mouth!" Duroy snarled, slashing me across the temple with the gun butt. My knees buckled, but Rossi grabbed me from behind and yanked me upright, pinning my arms.

"My partner," I threatened, "he'll—"

"He'll do nothing," Haggeman said calmly. "He can't go to the law now without incriminating himself. —But since I dislike loose ends, I'm going to give you one chance to tell me who he is, just one. Give us his name, Murphy, and you can walk away with—oh, say a thousand for your troubles. If not, Red's going to feed your good arm into the trencher's chain drive an inch at a time until you do tell us. And then we'll bury what's left of you with Schmidt. Now, who's your partner?"

"You bastards—"

"Wrong answer," Haggeman said, slamming the trencher into gear and gunning the tractor engine to bring up the speed of the chain. Duroy grabbed my left arm, twisted off my prosthesis, and pushed it into the rattling blur of the machinery, grinning as the fleshtone plastic shredded into confetti.

"One down," he said, and seized my right wrist with both hands,

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forcing my fingers toward the chain drive as I struggled numbly to hold back.

"Noooo! Please!"

Duroy flinched, then turned slowly away and stumbled to his knees, clutching at the pulsing crimson stain that had suddenly appeared at the base of his throat. Rossi leaned his full weight on my back, pushing me into the trencher. I put every ounce of strength I had into one despairing lunge, twisting away from the shovels, losing my footing in the heaped earth, and falling down into the open grave, slamming onto the concrete vault lid with Rossi on top of me.

I lay there for a dozen heartbeats, dazed, sobbing for breath, before I realized Rossi wasn't moving. Dead weight. I managed to roll him off and stared into the shattered remains of his face, pulped by a gaping wound at his hairline. And then the mouth of the grave darkened and Barnett was staring down at me, a scoped M-16 cradled in his arms, his face a grotesque battle mask of smeared camou grease.

"So," he said softly, "you seem to be in one piece. More or less."

"What the hell happened?"

"Miscalculated the range," Barnett said, squatting on his haunches. "Dug my spiderhole a little too far away, couldn't hear what was goin' on over the damn machinery. But when Duroy tore off your arm, I figured the situation was gettin' outta hand, so to speak. So I waxed him and Rossi."

"And Haggeman?"

"Him, too," Barnett nodded. "Thought he was reachin' for a piece, but he didn't have one. Definitely shoulda dug my hole closer."

"You killed them all?"

"Seemed like the right move at the time. Any complaints?"

"But what about the police?"

"Oh, we're here, sort of. I'm a cop," he said, flashing me a badge pinned inside the lapel of his fatigues. "Just auxiliary, but it's legit. Guess I forgot to mention it. I, ah, decided against callin' in anybody else. Figured Haggeman might spot 'em and I was right."

"You—used me, didn't you?" I said numbly. "You set this whole thing up."

"Maybe so," Barnett said coolly, "but it worked out. Look, Onandaga's my home town. I've known about Haggeman for years, but never could bust him. And then you waltzed in and gave him to me on a platter."

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"But you didn't even try to bust him. You killed them."

"Take a look around you, bro," he said softly. "You're surrounded by the graves of guys who went down in Nam. And more fall every year. From old wounds, or Agent Orange, suicide. Battle casualties—delayed, but just as dead. That's what happens when you get mixed up in other people's wars. Haggeman should have known that. He buried enough of 'em."

"And he's just another casualty? That's how you see it?"

"Why not? Look, under the law I got myself a clean bust here. Trouble is, Murphy, havin' you around kinda complicates things. I'm a little shaky on what constitutes entrapment these days, so maybe you better just grab that lunchbucket and jog on outta here. Buy yourself a new arm. I'll, ah, call the law after you're gone."

"Will you?"

"What's the problem, bro? You don't trust me?"

"I don't know. I don't have much choice, do I?"

"Nope, not really. So get humpin', okay?"

I humped it, jogging toward the gate, unsteady without my prosthesis to balance the weight of the lunchbucket, half expecting to get popped between the shoulderblades with every step. I paused at the entrance to breathe, and looked back.

Barnett was leaning against the tractor near Haggeman's body, calmly smoking a cigar. Waiting for the police? I couldn't be sure, but he seemed in no hurry to move on. And then I lost sight of him as the sky opened and an icy drizzle began pelting out of the mist. Lightning flickered on the horizon, artillery flashes, from battles fought half a world away, a long time ago. And the earth shuddered with the rumble of distant explosions, echoes unfolding in slow, slow motion.

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a ***NEW*** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

"I came by a while ago and you weren't at your desk," Flint accused Grando. "And I noticed you'd been doing crossword puzzles."

"One crossword puzzle. And I wasn't doing it. I'm creating it."

"On company time?"

"Yes." Grando sat tight. He could sense the big blade swinging, coming closer, and knew he ought to feel afraid, but it wasn't fear bubbling up from his gut. It was exhilaration.

"You don't seem to get it," Flint said. "There's plenty of work to be done for our clients. If yours is all done, maybe we're paying too many people . . ."

CROSS WORDS

by WILLIAM BANKIER

Sid Grando glanced up from his desk where he had begun blacking in a pattern on graph paper. Len Bidwell was standing in the doorway.

Poor old Len looked as if he had been shot. "I've been sacked," he said. "Flint just gave me two weeks' notice."

The news disturbed Grando but did not surprise him. Paulie Flint was trimming the deadwood, as promised. Three months had passed since Flint came aboard as Creative Director at Masterson's, sent from Montreal by the new parent agency, R&G Communications. In that time, he had cut five people adrift.

"Sit down, Sid. You must feel terrible."

"I feel murderous." Bidwell did not look like an art director in a modern agency. He was balding, with a grey fringe. He had a pub

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face with a smile like a Toby jug. During the war, he had been in corvettes. "Where am I going to find another job at my age?"

"There's always freelance." Grando hated taking on outside writing assignments, but for Sid he would make an exception—he'd seek freelance jobs and pass the artwork to his colleague. "I have a couple of things pending," he lied.

"Much appreciated." Bidwell peered at the squared rectangle on Grando's desk. "When your turn comes," he said, "you'll have your crossword puzzles to fall back on."

"It pays peanuts," Grando said, "but creating a puzzle gives me satisfaction."

It was eleven-thirty. Downstairs in Cambridge Circus, The Dog and Fox would be open. Len announced he was going for a quick half of Guinness. Feeling rebellious, Grando almost went along. But on the way to the elevators, he changed his mind and decided to remember a meeting with Basil Masterson. Vanishing behind the sliding oak doors, the copywriter continued on down the corridor to Basil's corner office.

Masterson was knocking golf balls across the carpet into an overturned glass.

"Got a minute, Basil?"

The unintended sarcasm tickled the former owner. "I may be able to squeeze you in, Sidney." He dropped the putter into an umbrella stand and assumed an executive posture behind his desk, which was as clean as a skating rink.

Grando fell into a chair, stretched his legs, and crossed his ankles some distance away. "He's letting Leonard go," he said without preamble.

"I know."

"Why don't you do something about it?"

"Paulie has the power."

"This used to be your agency. Did they cut off all your clout?"

Grandson of the founder of Masterson Advertising, Basil was no businessman. But he was Eton and Oxford, he had charm, and a few of the firm's clients had prestigious names—it was an ideal takeover for an ambitious Canadian outfit seeking a foothold in Europe. And the offer from R&G was a boon to Basil, who owned property, including the building housing the agency, but whose cash-flow situation was not healthy. In reply to Grando's question about his clout being cut off, he said, "I'm glad they stopped there."

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"Your father would never have let Flint have his way with decent people."

"We'll never know, will we? Father blotted his copybook and the less said about his actions the better."

When Grando arrived back in his own office, he discovered a significant addition to the papers scattered on his desk. A certain blue memo pad had begun molting around the premises, dropping its pages everywhere, each one bearing the inscription, *From the desk of Paulie Flint.* Now one was placed dead center on the embryonic crossword puzzle. It bore three little words scrawled in spidery ballpoint. "See me soonest!"

Grando carried the note with him as he walked to the new Creative Director's office. The door was open. Flint had dinned the slogan into the minds of apprehensive staff for weeks after his arrival in May. "My door is always open." It was intended to convey accessibility for problem-solving, but to the reticent Brits it was as if they had been told the morgue never closed. Grando walked in. The office looked like a grocery store. Flint intended to pitch for a number of accounts and had surrounded himself with displays of the target products.

Flint's back was to the door. His shoes were propped on the window ledge, and as he stared down the canyon of Charing Cross Road he spoke into a dictating machine. "And the departmental budget, following staff reductions in the second quarter, will be down eleven percent."

"You wanted to see me, Paulie?"

Flint swung around and flashed a disarming grin. He was in his early forties, but the Canadian had managed to assume the identity of the elderly farmer. His close-cropped hair was prematurely grey, his thick eyebrows were black, his eyes were like green marbles, and a perpetual lopsided grin exposed large white teeth with one gold molar signaling from the back.

"Sid, we've got a problem." The statement was uttered in a spirit of thanksgiving. Here was that greatest of blessings, a problem! They would fatten on the satisfaction of solving it.

Grando ran his life differently. He tried to avoid problems. "What is it?"

"Now that the lows-and-slows have been eliminated, the rest of us have to buckle down and work hard."

"We always do."

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"Not always, Sid. I came by a while ago and you weren't at your desk. And I noticed you'd been doing crossword puzzles."

"One crossword puzzle. And I wasn't doing it. I'm creating it."

"On company time?"

"Yes." Grando sat tight. He could sense the big blade swinging, coming closer, and knew he ought to feel afraid, but it wasn't fear bubbling up from his gut. It was exhilaration.

"You don't seem to get it," Flint said. "There's plenty of work to be done for our clients. If yours is all done, maybe we're paying too many people."

"Writing advertising isn't like making shoes. I don't sit down at my bench at nine o'clock and turn out copy automatically until we close at five-thirty." Grando was calm. "Much of my best thinking is done over dinner, or while I shower in the morning. On my time."

"Crossword puzzles—come on."

"Designing a puzzle stimulates my brain. I write better copy after a puzzle session. Anyway, I've always done them."

"I don't think you should any more."

"Then you've got a problem." Grando got up but he made no move to leave the office. He stared down at the Creative Director, noticing that the red suspenders stretching over his shoulders had little gold crowns on them. "May I say something?"

"Anything you like."

"Why don't you calm down? My guess is that you're just like the rest of us underneath that dynamite exterior. I can understand you had to impress Head Office when you arrived here, but you've made your moves."

"What this has to do with anything, I'll never know."

"Masterson's has always been a nice place to work. If you'd relax, the projects would still be taken care of. And we might all have a little fun."

As he walked away, Grando heard Flint pick up the telephone and dial three numbers. No prizes for guessing whose extension he was calling. Sackings of senior personnel would be cleared with Basil Masterson.

Masterson was hanging around the main doorway of the building after 5:30. When Sid stepped out into the sunlight of a benign August evening, Basil fell in step beside him. "I've just deflected a rocket from you, old chap," he said.

"I'm not surprised. Paulie and I had cross words."

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"Cross words? Oh, very good. I had to telephone Mother on your behalf when he refused to listen to me. She came on the line and read our colonial friend the lesson. Told him she looks forward to solving your puzzles whenever one appears in *Southern Counties Monthly*. Flint has no respect for me. But Meridien put the fear in him. You should have seen his face."

"Thank your mother for me when you see her."

"That'll be in an hour. She gets lonely down there in Kent with Father gone from the house. I'm on my way to Charing Cross to catch a Tenterden train." Basil flashed a salute and was swallowed up in the rush-hour crowd.

As he worked out his two weeks' notice, Len Bidwell became more hostile toward Paulie Flint by the day. He began showing up in the afternoon with his skin two thirds full of beer. He hid in Grando's office, inventing ways to bring down Flint. "How about importing one of the girls from the pub? She'll get Flint in a compromising position, then we'll rush in with a camera and catch her going through his briefs."

"Nice one, Len." Grando would keep on working, lending Bidwell vocal support.

The gun arrived in a paper bag on Thursday afternoon. Bidwell gleefully exposed a dark cylindrical shape at the mouth of the bag, then the gun was revealed in all its Teutonic menace—a World War I souvenir weapon, a Luger. Grando acknowledged the gun's magnificence, then asked a key question. "Have you got ammo for this thing? I hope the answer is no."

Bidwell smirked. He took three cartridges from his pocket and cupped them in the palm of his hand. "Two for our friend," he said. "And when the job is nicely done, one for me."

"Put the gun away, Leonard. And give me the bullets."

"No can do, comrade."

"Don't compound your difficulties."

"Quite the contrary. The enemy is in view," Bidwell said. "And for the first time in months, I can see clearly."

Midmorning Friday, Masterson appeared in the doorway of Sid's office. His handsome face gleamed with embarrassment. "Meridien has done this unusual thing," he said. "She's commanded me to invite you for the weekend."

"The house in Kent? Eating meals? Drinking? Sleeping over?"

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"All those things. Isn't it bizarre? But it gets worse. I'm to ask Paulie Flint as well. In fact, I've done so and he's accepted."

"Curiouser and curiouser."

"I know what she's up to. Since I told her about the trouble between you and Flint over the crosswords, she wants to be peacemaker. She believes if she can get the pair of you in the house for a couple of days, you'll end up friends." Masterson frowned. "I can't see why. My father was there constantly and he became an utter villain."

Grando said, "You'll have to tell me how to get there."

"Mother hates people arriving in dribs and drabs. So we shall travel together on the train. We meet at ten o'clock tomorrow morning—the W. H. Smith kiosk, Charing Cross Station."

Another reason for disliking Paulie Flint was his splendid luggage. He arrived at the station carrying a grey-leather bag that exactly matched his briefcase. He swung the latter high as he said to Grando, "I hope there will be time for a little work."

"A weekend without labor is like a mine without salt," Sid responded.

"Are we going to be at each other's throats for two days?"

"And a night."

"Why can't we get along?"

"Because you sacked Len Bidwell. Have you considered how hard it can be for a man his age to find another job?"

"I have my problems, too," the Creative Director said, and his face sagged with weariness. "Someday I may tell you."

Basil appeared from the direction of the ticket windows. "Gate eleven," he said, leading the way. "Mother is meeting the train."

As they waited at the gate while Basil showed tickets to a British Rail employee, Grando thought he saw a familiar figure drifting among travelers fifty yards away. When they were through and walking down the platform, he said quietly to Basil, "Did you invite Len Bidwell?"

"Lord, no."

"Does he know we're going?"

"Bidwell has radar," the former owner said. "He knows everything he needs to know."

The men drank beer on the train—it was going to be that sort of weekend. They were soon outside London's urban sprawl with the green hills of Kent looking lush after an early-morning rain followed

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by clearing skies. Masterson had a mischievous gleam in his eye as he said, "How do you two adversaries like it so far?"

"I'm cool," Flint said. His first beer had gone down quickly and he was looking vaguely surprised at its effect, like a man experiencing remission from the symptoms of an unpleasant illness.

Grando said, "I'm on record. I believe Paulie could be an okay colleague if he'd relax."

Flint took a swallow from his second pint. "Once upon a time in an ad agency far away," he said, "a senior copywriter blew it. He lost his temper and told an important client to do an impossible thing. Management had a choice: fire the writer or ship him overseas. They offered him the options. No problem choosing. At his age, he knew finding a new job would be difficult."

"Ask Len Bidwell," Grando said.

"I'm on a hook," Flint countered. "Not only have I been handed this assignment, I have one year to turn a loose operation into a profitable one. And Head Office is not kidding."

"Masterson's has always been a sloppy shop," Basil confirmed. "Father was like me—he enjoyed playing."

"I'm trying hard to do what they want me to do." Flint swallowed more beer. "Hey Basil, what *about* your old man? I don't mean at the office. I heard something about a scandal at home."

Masterson glanced at his watch. "I suppose I should get it out of the way," he said, "before you meet my mother. And Inga."

As the train rolled on past fields of hops strung on poles, Basil told them about Cedric Masterson, the devastating playboy who partied, gambled, and broke the hearts of pretty women all the years the son could remember. It was a stressful life at the big house in London's Belgravia district. But it was exciting, too. For all the female tears—perhaps because of them—there was never any doubt that a man occupied the Masterson house.

Inga came from Sweden to serve as maid and companion for Meridien, who was tired of spending time alone. In her twenties and a small-town girl, Inga had all the skills of cooking, sewing, and playing card games. She was a fine companion for Mrs. Masterson. She served Cedric even better, looking as she did like a Swedish starlet, and having a romantic nature.

"It might have been no big deal," Basil went on, "had my father not arrived home very drunk one night. He sought out Inga in her room downstairs. Nobody will ever know what was said, exactly. Inga pleads a sort of amnesia, but I think she doesn't want to talk.

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She set him off in some way and Cedric lost control. He started beating her and couldn't stop. Not until she was nearly dead."

"But you said we'd be meeting her today."

"Yes, she recovered. And moved with Meridien to the house in Kent when my mother sold the place in Belgravia. All this was two years ago."

Flint looked thoughtful. "Did it have to be your father? Couldn't it have been an intruder?"

"It was Cedric," Basil said. "He disappeared that night. Ran for it. They've not seen hide nor hair of him since. He had lots of friends and the police believe someone hid him or helped him get out of the country. There have been reports of people spotting him back in England. Others say he died in France."

Tenterden Station was quiet on a Saturday morning. As soon as the train departed, Grando heard the droning of bees and he smelled clover. Cool air rolled across the platform from a shady hillside.

The men carried their overnight bags outside and found Meridien Masterson leaning against the fender of a green convertible. The car's jaunty lines had been designed fifty years ago. Meridien was equally attractive and about the same age. She drew a scarf from her head, letting auburn hair cascade to her shoulders as she greeted her son and his companions.

"Spot on time!" she called. "People disparage British Rail, but I'm a believer!"

Basil embraced his mother and introduced Paulie Flint. With luggage stowed and two passengers installed on the spacious back seat, she got the car moving. Then she turned to Grando beside her and said, "Well, Sidney, how are those inflammatory puzzles?"

Everybody laughed and Basil said, "You've cleared the air from the start, Mother. Is Inga at the house?"

"Yes. And excited about having visitors."

Meridien guided the car off the main highway and onto a secondary road leading away from town. After a couple of miles, they found themselves traveling a country lane set fifteen feet below the level of the surrounding fields. It wound beneath a canopy of branches with dappled sunlight filtering past leaves that appeared lemon yellow. Now the car swung onto a dirt track and drove slowly up a gentle rise. There was the house—a low structure enclosed in shrubbery, tiled roofs extending in several directions. There was the pond

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with a bent elm beside it. In the distance, behind a rail fence, a dozen sheep safely grazed. Two ducks drifted on the pond.

"It's like something from a movie," Flint murmured.

"The shrubs and flowers need tending," Meridien said. "I hired a gardener but he doesn't do much." She led the way toward the house. "Well, I don't pay him much. He gets the south cottage free of rent." They followed her gaze and saw, close to a line of trees, the thatched roof of a cottage on the lowest ground. A trickle of smoke from its chimney rose into the still air. "The old fool is probably asleep in a chair with his pipe falling out of his mouth," she concluded.

Inga Hager was waiting in the doorway. Her blonde beauty, fragile as a cameo, was marred by a crooked nose. Basil had alerted his colleagues to expect it. The only visible evidence of her beating, she refused to have it seen to by a plastic surgeon. It was as if she wore it to remind herself and others of how badly she'd been used by his vanished father.

"Inga, dear," Meridien called, "come and meet some new friends, Sid and Paulie."

The younger woman shook hands hesitantly. "I hope here you will not be bored," she said.

"We get too much excitement in London," Grando said. "We seek boredom."

They were shown their rooms. All were on the ground floor, facing the sheep pasture and dark hills beyond. "The plumbing is better," Inga said, "than upstairs."

The comfortable house, and Meridien's obvious pleasure at having guests, relaxed everybody. After lunch, they sat in deep chairs by an open fire and drank gin and tonic. Flint told stories about his life in Montreal. Basil matched him with anecdotes about London. Grando produced a yarn or two from his days at another agency. And Meridien had interesting things to say about old times in Belgravia. Inga's contribution was a hilarious impersonation of the postmaster in the village.

In the late afternoon, they decided to go outside. The air was sweet as they carried their glasses on a tour of the grounds around the cottage. They ended up at a fence, peering across the sheep enclosure. "What a great place for a baseball diamond," Flint commented.

"Baseball?" Inga said.

"I'm talking about the game of baseball. America's national pastime, which is also big in Canada. To say nothing of Japan."

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"Don't anybody say anything of Japan," Basil warned.

"I've never seen a baseball game," Meridien complained.

"If I had a baseball, I'd show you what you've been missing," Flint said.

"Would a cricket ball be useful?" Meridien offered. "There's one in the study, Basil."

Masterson strode back to the cottage, returning with a lopsided sphere in red leather. He tossed it to Flint, who squeezed it in both hands as if trying to extract the last drop of juice. "Now we need home plate, three bases, and bat."

A shovel was found in a nearby shed to serve as a bat and a large rock was designated home plate. Flint explained the technical details as, pacing out the distances, he dropped stones in place as the bases. The game began with Flint pitching and Meridien wielding the shovel. She had an accurate swing and soon sent the ball flying far out into the pasture. Grando chased it, threw it to Flint, and came trotting back, feeling better than he had felt in years.

After his turn at bat, Basil made another trip to the cottage and returned with the gin. They played until the sun dipped close to the hilltops and the air turned cool. "Confess," Meridien insisted as they proceeded back to the warmth of the fire. "We are having much more fun than any of us expected."

"We are like old friends," Inga stated emphatically.

When it had been dark for a time, the hostess said, "Are we all good and hungry?"

"Here's a suggestion," Basil said. "Instead of doing supper, why don't we drive over to The Fox and Grapes where I'll treat everybody to their fine Lancashire Hotpot."

"And if you think my son and I rehearsed this bit," Meridien said, "you're absolutely right."

The pub was crowded on a Saturday night. Paulie was vocal about everything—the food, the beer, the local citizenry, even the darts board. When the plates were off the table, leaving room for glasses and elbows, Meridien said, "Has world war been averted?"

They knew what she meant. Grando said, "Paulie Flint turned out to be a civil bloke after all."

"I needed time to pick up the feel of things over here," Flint said.

"I am still trying," Inga said.

The mood was interrupted for Sid Grando less than an hour later.

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He was on his way back from the men's room when he saw Len Bidwell lurking near the back door.

"How did you get here?"

"Same way you did. Took a train." The art director was as drunk as Grando had ever seen him.

"What's it all about?"

"Been going over the ground. On foot. Silly game you lot were playing with the shovel."

"Don't drink any more, Len."

"Tell our Canadian friend not to stray from the cottage. I hear the hunting is good around here."

"Have you got that gun with you?"

"That's for me to know and you to find out."

Basil Masterson hove into view on his way from table to bar. "Bidwell! What a surprise!"

"He's out of his mind with drink. And he's been threatening Paulie."

"Paulie, sweet Paulie," Bidwell chanted, starting off by himself to the bar. "Everybody's friend now."

"I see what you mean," Basil told Grando.

"We can't let him roam around loose. And we don't want to set the police on him." Grando refrained from mentioning the gun. He didn't yet trust Flint fully. The newcomer might blow the whistle and get Len in trouble for possession of a concealed weapon.

"I have the answer," Basil said. "We'll bring him back to the house. We'll lock him in a spare room and let him sleep it off."

Bidwell raved in the back seat between Sid and Basil all the way back to the house. Inga made soothing noises. Flint sat beside Meridien at the wheel as if his head was above the parapet and there were snipers about. When they got the irrational man inside and into a bedroom upstairs, the door locked, Basil said, "He'll babble away for a while, then with any luck we should all get a night's sleep."

Pajama-clad, Flint passed Grando outside the bathroom. "Was I wrong to fire that nutcase or wasn't I?" he said smugly.

"Get it right," Sid told him. "If you hadn't sacked him, he wouldn't be doing this."

Grando decided to apologize to his hostess. He found Meridien's door down the long hall and rapped on the panel. She opened up

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immediately. Noticing she was fully dressed, he said, "Oh, good. I was afraid I'd be disturbing you."

"I intend to read for a while."

"I'm sorry my friend is causing so much trouble."

"On the contrary. Ladies like me crave excitement."

"You're very good about it." Grando realized he was being more of a pest than Len Bidwell and said goodnight. On the way back to his room, he spotted the pale figure of Inga Hager crossing the upstairs landing, looking adorable in pale pajamas and slippers. They exchanged waves and he went to bed.

The sound of breaking glass and the gunshots, two of them, put his feet on the floor some hours later. Switching on the bedside lamp, he saw the time was half past one. He could hear doors opening in the hall, voices. Slinging on his robe, he hurried into the corridor. Basil was entering Flint's room. Sid followed and found the two men standing by the window, inspecting a shattered pane.

"He must have gotten out of his room through the window," Basil said. "I'm sorry I suggested putting him up here."

"It's my fault," Grando said. "I had an idea he had a gun. I should have mentioned it."

The intended victim was less bothered than the other two. "He's a terrible shot. I was a stationary target but the bullets are somewhere in the wall."

"Can we be absolutely sure it was Len?"

Basil led the way out through a side door. The window of Bidwell's room on the second floor was wide open, curtains billowing outward. Torn ivy marked his progress down the side of the house. "It was Len, all right," he said. "We'd better find him."

Inga appeared from the main entrance. She had on a yachting jacket over her pajamas and training shoes on her feet. "Are we in danger?" she asked.

"I doubt it," Basil said.

"I won't be hurt again!" she said and withdrew into the darkness.

"I'll check the pasture toward the woods," Basil told the men. "Both of you check the slope down to the cottage."

"Shouldn't somebody see how Meridien is doing?"

"Mother takes a couple of pills and then reads herself to sleep," Basil said, moving off. "After that a bomb wouldn't waken her."

Making his way down the path by moonlight with Flint a few

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paces behind, Grando said, "Len showed me three bullets. Two were intended for you."

"And the other?"

"He planned to use it on himself."

They were almost at the cottage when Basil, running hard, caught up to them. "Nothing in the pasture," he panted. "He'd be more likely to go this way." As they moved toward the dark shape of the cottage still some distance away, they heard a single shot. All three men ran toward the sound. Basil was first around the corner of the house. "There's a lamp on inside!"

When the others reached him, they could see there was illumination from the open doorway as well. "Be careful," Grando said, "Len may still be there." Thinking further, he added, "But he has no bullets left."

There was one person inside the cottage. It was a dead man, but it was not Len Bidwell. The body lay on the floor outside an open doorway leading into the bedroom. Basil knelt and studied the bearded face. "Good Lord," he whispered. "It's my father."

At his desk on Monday morning, Sid drank his coffee and accepted reality. He would do no work today, neither advertising copy nor crossword puzzle. His mind was still at the Masterson estate in peaceful, pastoral Kent. Paulie Flint wandered in at ten o'clock, looking equally bemused. They began to replay the events of the weekend.

"I got the feeling the police were glad to find Cedric Masterson dead," the Canadian said.

"It closes a file for them. The press enjoyed taunting them over the way he managed to disappear."

Flint's face looked softer than before. He was like a stray cat that has found a safe place to feed. "Will we ever see Len Bidwell again?"

"The police should run him down. Poor old Len, he must have believed he'd killed you."

"He could be countries away by now."

But Len Bidwell arrived around eleven, presented himself in Grando's office, and meekly placed the Luger on the desk. "Hundreds of pardons, old chap. I've been a proper idiot. Putting wild shots through Flint's window. But no more. There's the gun and the last bullet." He slumped in a chair. "You can call the police if you like."

Grando's mind was racing. He checked the pistol and confirmed the third bullet was there. As he placed the weapon in his center

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drawer and locked it, he said, "You didn't shoot Basil's father? The bearded man in the cottage?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." Len glanced at his watch. "Pubs are open." Sid said nothing and he sighed. "I must stop drinking in the morning. And leaning on you for assistance. I'm such a wet. Apex Studios is always looking for competent people to sit at a drawing-board and do mechanical pasteups. I can earn a living."

"I'm glad to hear you sounding this way. But where did you go after you fired through Paulie's window?"

"Down the hill to the main road. I wandered back to town and sat in the railway station. Slept on a bench till five, when the next train pulled in."

"But the police checked your flat in London. I'm afraid I gave them your address."

"I didn't go there. I was shattered." The artist managed to look furtive and smug at the same time. "There's this girl I know has a place in Putney. She comforts me sometimes."

Grando came to the unanswered question. "Then if you didn't shoot Cedric Masterson, I wonder who did?"

Basil looked in on Grando before midday. "I was just on the telephone to Mother," he said. "As if the weekend wasn't enough, Inga has left her. Meridien says she must talk to somebody."

Grando said, "Hmmm."

Basil said, "That sounds like a horizontal word of an indeterminate number of letters meaning the mystery is nearing its conclusion."

"Len just left here. He's on his way to Apex to apply for a job. He's no murderer—I have the gun with the third bullet in my desk. Somebody else killed your father."

Basil looked thoughtful.

"You and I should head back down to Kent and talk with your mother," Sid said.

"Not necessary. She's on her way here. I'm meeting her for lunch at the club." Basil picked up the telephone. "With your permission, I'll change it to a reservation for three."

Guilt added a dimension to Meridien Masterson's wounded beauty. She squeezed lemon onto her jellied consomme. Then she disturbed it with a tiny silver spoon, but did not eat. "I didn't kill him," she said. "It was Inga. But I'm responsible for his death."

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"What exactly happened, Mother?"

"Cedric escaped to France. He altered his appearance with the beard and contact lenses and a dark rinse on his hair. After a year, he began using a false passport to reenter the U.K. He would book a room in London and I'd come in to be with him." She shrugged. "It was my idea to make the cottage available by saying I'd hired a gardener. Inga discovering the truth was only a matter of time. Tell me, Sidney, you understand all this psychology business. By establishing him so close to home, was I trying to punish Cedric and bring myself down, too?"

"Saturday night, Mother," Basil prompted her. "What happened?"

"Cedric and I were not asleep. We heard two shots. Cedric put on a light and we looked outside. There was activity up the slope. Not wanting to be discovered with him, I hurried back to the house. I let myself in by the side door, went to my room, and got into bed. Inga must have run down to the cottage minutes later, found Cedric, and shot him."

"Did she have a gun?"

"She was so frightened after she recovered two years ago, I bought her one for protection. She kept it in her bedside table. She must have run with it to my room to see if I was all right, found my bed unused, run to the cottage, and encountered Cedric."

"You didn't see her kill him," Sid said. "Why do you think she's guilty?"

"Because she's run away. And the gun is gone with her."

There was an interval while three waiters removed one course and served another. Wine glasses were refilled. Then Basil said, "We'll tell some sort of edited version to the police. And they, no doubt, will stop chasing Len while they track down Inga and put her in prison."

"She won't receive much of a sentence," Grando said, "when the jury hears what Cedric did to her. And almost got away with."

Meridien said, "I'm the one who should be punished."

"Are we talking about justice?" Basil asked. "What does it mean, Sidney? You're the expert."

"Seven-letter word," Grando said. "Meaning different things to different people."

A year later, Inga Hager had still not been located. Sid Grando had long since stopped talking or even thinking about the murder. Paulie Flint was calmly settled in at Masterson's. He had phoned

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Len Bidwell to offer him his job back, but the art director hadn't returned the call.

Grando encountered his old colleague at the Apex Christmas party. Hundreds of advertising people were drinking in the studio complex in Paddington. Bidwell was tucked into a window-seat with a bottle of wine at his side and a glass to his lips. "Not only fell off the wagon," he mumbled, "it's disappeared around the corner."

"Once a year," Grando offered.

"I hope so." Bidwell raised a haunted face. "Never did apologize for shooting that bloke."

"What?"

"Basil's old man. I didn't know it was him at the time. Just went into the cottage to hide. Suddenly he comes rushing out of the bedroom and—I reacted."

Grando didn't want to believe it. If Len's story was true, why had Inga fled like a guilty person? Because life with Meridien Masterson was finally too dangerous? He turned back to Len. "It's the drink. When you turned the gun over to me, I checked it out. The third bullet was still in it."

"Ah." Bidwell took a drink. "When I showed you three bullets and said that was all I had, I'm afraid I failed to mention there was one in the chamber."

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a *NEW* Em Grady story by

JANE BOSWORTH

Doc Nelson went on to tell Em about a building inspector from the State of California, a James M. White, who was condemning the wiring in some of the original buildings in the town of Julian.

"What's wrong with tellin' folks they got to replace their old wirin'?" she asked him.

"It just seems strange that the only folks he's telling this to are widows," Dr. Nelson said. "If all the original buildings were wired in the early nineteen-thirties, why is it that only the widows seem to have cracked rubber sheathing around their wires . . .?"

TARRIN' TURKEYS

by JANE BOSWORTH

A letter come this mornin' an' inside it was a gift certificate for two nights' stay for two in Aunt Juanita's Guesthouse in Julian, California. I looked at the dates on the certificate an' seen they was good for tomorrow an' Saturday nights.

Em, I says to myself, who on earth would send you such a thing on so short a notice?

Then I seen that the certificate was courtesy of a Randolph L. Nelson.

Nelson. The name bolted out a my past.

Nelson. It slapped me a good one.

Dr. Randolph L. Nelson.

The name brung back memories, bitterly sharp memories, an' with them memories come the image of a young psychologist with thick glasses an' a ponytail. Dr. Randolph Nelson was the doctor who finally released me from my court-ordered stay at a mental hospital.

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But why would Dr. Nelson send you this? I asked myself. Why, after all these years?

I pressed the certificate to my heart an' thought over all Dr. Nelson had done for me. Not just gettin' me released, but helpin' me to cope with the pain an' anger an' guilt that my Elmer's murder gave me.

I turned the certificate over an' seen that they was writin' on the back of it.

"Emily," the message said, "someone I love needs your help. Please call me."

I dialed the number he give me an' a man answered on the second ring.

"Doctor Nelson," he said.

"Doc, this here is Em Grady," I said. "I got your certificate in the mail today. Just what can I do for you?"

"I wouldn't have bothered you with this, Emily, except that Doc Parady keeps me informed about you and Jake McEwan," he said. "Doc said maybe you two could help." He went on to tell me about a building inspector from the State of California, a James M. White, who was condemning the wiring in some of the original buildings in the little town a Julian.

"What's wrong with tellin' folks they got to replace their old wirin'?" I asked.

"It just seems strange that the only folks he's telling this to are widows," Dr. Nelson said. "If all the original buildings were wired in the early nineteen-thirties, why is it that only the widows seem to have cracked rubber sheathing around their wires?"

"Rubber sheathing?" I asked. "Are you sure it's rubber?"

"That's what my Aunt Juanita Nelson said it was when she called to borrow ten thousand dollars in cash for the down payment on the work that's got to be done."

"Who told her it was rubber sheathing?" I asked.

"Both the state building inspector, James White, and the contractor who's going to do the work, T. J. Watson."

"You say she paid this here contractor in cash?" I asked. "Ain't that a bit unusual?"

"The man offered a ten percent discount on the entire job if she paid his fifty-percent down payment in cash. The whole thing sounds fishy to me, Em."

"Have you talked to the local sheriff?" I asked.

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"I did, and he says he checked on the credentials of both men. I think all he did was dial the phone numbers on their business cards."

"What do you want me an' Jake to do?" I asked.

"I want you to go to Julian and snoop around," he said. "Both White and Watson are scheduled to leave town the day after tomorrow. Maybe that's just a coincidence or maybe they're fixing to disappear with all the cash. I thought you and Jake might be able to find out what, if anything, they're up to. Will you do it for me, Emily?"

" 'Course I'll do it," I said. "But I ain't too sure I can get there by tonight."

"I've already talked to Carlos Guerra," he said. "All you have to do is give Carlos a call when you know what time you'll be ready to leave."

"You musta been mighty sure I'd do this."

"Emily," he said, "what I am sure of is your integrity, your empathy, and, above all, your sense of justice. They wouldn't let you say no."

I didn't know whether to thank him for the compliment or curse him for knowin' me so well. For a while after I said my goodbye, I stood there by the phone remembering the way my Elmer looked that day he set off with Sophie, his burro, to go out into the desert an' teach Beatty a lesson. The way she come brayin' home without him. The way that fly had walked across my Elmer's wide, unseeing eyes.

Beatty killed my Elmer. Woulda killed me, too, iffen he hadn't a fallen into that mine shaft. I've never regretted leavin' him there to die—even if leavin' him there did cost me that six months in a state mental hospital.

I phoned Jake an' told him we was needed by someone in trouble. But when he asked me who had need of our services, the pain of rememberin' caused my voice to stumble an' break. I knowed that iffen I said any more, I'd break down cryin'.

"My dear Emily," Jake said, "I'll be there as soon as I can. Then you can tell me all about it." He hung up.

I stood listenin' to the buzz in the phone, concentratin' on it so's I wouldn't think on anythin' else, then I set down the receiver an' forced myself to do what had to be done.

I packed my bag, then I went out back an' dug up my money jar, took out a wad a bills, an' reburied the jar. Then I phoned Carlos

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to tell him we'd be at the Wickenburg Municipal Airport sometime before noon.

Standin' on the porch waitin' for Jake, starin' at the sagebrush, I started playin' the no-win game of what-ifs over Elmer's death. What if I hadn't let him an' Sophie go off by theirselves? What if I'd followed along behind them? What if I'd had the good sense to alert Sheriff Bill? By the time Jake parked that fancy Mercedes a his in front a my rock shop, I was so soured by what-ifs that I never even answered his howdy. Instead, I carried my bag to the car, set it in the back seat, an' slumped down in the passenger seat.

Jake sat lookin' at me. "Want to tell me about it?" he asked.

I looked over an' seen carin' in them blue eyes a his. "The person who asked for our help is Doctor Nelson," I said. "I guess it was just a shock hearin' from him after all these years, that's all."

Jake give my shoulder a lovin' rub. "It's more than that, isn't it, Emily?" he said.

"The past keeps hauntin' me," I managed to say.

"No, Emily. Not haunt. Never that," he said. "Because you've damned little to regret in your past. Someday, when you realize that, then maybe—"

You'll marry me. My mind supplied the words he couldn't bring himself to say again.

I looked at this wonderful, warm man, at this gigolo a the senior citizens' set who cared so deeply for me, an' I realized that countin' your blessin's beats the heck out a wallowin' in regrets.

"Jake McEwan," I said, "don't you go givin' up on me just yet. 'Cause it just ain't possible to keep a good woman down for long."

I seen the devil come waltzin' into them blue eyes a his. Then he licked a smile into place. "Emily, my sweet love—" his voice was oily "—I sincerely hope you're wrong about keeping a good woman down for long, because if you're right you'll destroy my weekend plans for us."

The gleam in his eye had more than a spark a hope in it. Danged iffen them sparks didn't set my heart to smolderin'. Then it got to irkin' me that I could be so schoolgirl foolish.

"You're a twisted man, Jake McEwan," I said. "But I reckon a straight man wouldn't be as much fun."

"I was hoping you'd see things that way, Emily," he said.

At the Wickenburg Municipal Airport, Carlos Guerra stood beside

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a helicopter parked on the macadam in front a his hangar. "Well, here she is," he said, rubbin' a hand over the steel hide a that chopper. "She's a Belljet Ranger and she's all gassed up and ready for action. I borrowed her from Greasy McKay."

"Ain't we gonna take a plane?" I asked.

"There's noplace to land one in Julian," he said. "But this baby doesn't need any more landing room than she is long and wide. And she's thirty-nine feet, one inch long and six feet, six inches wide."

I took a good long look at the length an' width a her. Then I looked up at a propeller that was almost twenty feet wider than her body.

"What about her propeller?" I asked. "Ain't you got to have landing clearance for that, too?"

Carlos shed a look a pure concern on that propeller.

"I guess I didn't think about it," he said.

I looked over at Jake an' seen that he'd turned a might peaked. He nodded toward Carlos. When I looked back, I seen that Carlos had started pacin' off a propeller-length circle 'round the helicopter.

"Emily," Jake said, "maybe we could drive there."

"We don't have the time to drive there," I told him.

Carlos completed his circle an' stood in front a us.

"I figure we'll need the space of a fifty-foot-diameter circle in order to clear the propeller," he said. "Hopefully, we'll have that much clearance."

"And if we don't?" Jake asked.

"Leave that to me," Carlos said. "Shall we get in?"

Jake give me a look that said I-don't-wanna-go an' stood waitin' to see what I would do. Naturally, I climbed aboard the helicopter, sat in a seat, an' looked him square in the eye. "Both a us has lived a long, full life," I said. "An' I reckon we'll be called home when the Good Lord sees fit."

"Emily, please," he interrupted. "I don't need that kind of comfort right now."

He climbed aboard, sat down in the seat next to mine, an' fastened his seat belt as tight as it would go. Carlos, in the pilot's seat, started the engine an' lifted off. Like it or not, we were on our way.

Carlos didn't seem to have no problems flyin' her over the desert or landin' her in Blythe for refuelin' or takin' off again. He did get a slight yaw on her when we flew up an' over the Laguna Mountains, but by the time we reached the outskirts a Julian he had her flyin' straight again. He flew north to a wide spot between mountains

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where a bearded man was wavin' his arms in the air, then he set the helicopter down nice an' easylike between a cliff an' a mountain an' a row a dilapidated cars. He shut down the engine, turned around in his seat, an' grinned at us.

"Not too bad for the first time, was it?" he asked.

"I knew it," Jake muttered. "I just knew it."

"You mean you never flew one a these before?" I yelled at Carlos.

"Sure, I've flown them before," he came to his own defense. "Only on simulators, but they're just as easy to maneuver in real life." He opened his door an' jumped out, leavin' Jake an' me starin' at one another.

"We can take the bus home if you want," I said.

'Course I knowed that takin' a bus anywhere would jab Jake right where it hurts, in his ego. He looked out the window at the cliff to the right of us. Then he looked out the other window at the mountain that had the barrier of outused cars between us an' it.

I seen him shudder. Then he sighed. "Carlos must be a good pilot," he said, "or he'd never been able to set this chopper down here."

"Maybe it was beginner's—"

"Emily." Jake's voice was firm. "Some things are best left unsaid. Shall we go meet the man who waved us down?"

Amos McDerby was just as beer-bellied as he looked to be from the air, but he was taller than I expected—about six-four, I'd guess. He welcomed us to the Lazy Susan Gold Mine an' pointed to the square-timbered shaft in the side a the mountain that was its namesake.

"You still minin' here?" I asked.

"Not any more," he said. "Her gold-bearing tunnels have flooded out and it's just too expensive to pump the water out. I only go in her to sweep down the shoring on her main tunnel or putter with the gasoline engine that runs her hoist."

He run a hand through his beard. "But it ain't mining that brung you here," he said. "It's Juanita's foolishness. If you'll get your things, I'll run you into town so you can talk to her." His bushy grey eyebrows formed angry arches above his eyes. "Maybe you can talk some sense into that woman. God only knows, I sure as hell tried."

"You a friend a Aunt Juanita Nelson?" I asked.

Pain drifted onto his angry face. "Used to be more than that," he said. Then he sighed. "My car's over there. Whenever you're ready, I'll drive you into town."

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He drove us into Julian, turned right on Main Street near the Old Julian Hotel, drove three blocks, turned right again, an' then parked on the street in front of a two-storied gingerbread an' lace Victorian house that had a sign out front identifyin' it as Aunt Juanita's Guesthouse. Carlos an' Jake an' me got out a the car, but at first Amos sat there broodin'. Then he looked up at me. "Juanita makes the best apple pie in town," he said. "And you can tell her I said so, too. Tell her Amos McDerby has never tasted better pie than hers."

"Why don't you tell her yourself?" I asked him.

A cloud settled on his face. "We ain't been talking since we had a spat over them new boarders of hers," he said. "Over the honesty of Misters White and Watson, as Juanita calls them. Listen, if you dig up anything on those two turkeys, anything at all, just let me know. Me and the boys can take care of them."

He drove off without sayin' goodbye.

Aunt Juanita Nelson was a grey-haired wisp of a woman who stood about as high as my shoulder, but she was anythin' but helpless. She marched us into the lobby an' had us sign the registration cards. Then she told us the only other boarders were in 6 an' 7, assigned our rooms, an' give us our orders. We was to take our luggage upstairs to our rooms an' meet her in ten minutes in the downstairs parlor.

"Then we will discuss why my nephew sent you people here," she said.

"Yes, sir," I couldn't resist sayin'.

The look on Aunt Juanita Nelson's face sent Carlos fleein' up the stairs with Jake on his heels, but I weren't about to run. I picked up my suitcase an' moseyed on up to my room.

"Why do you think Doctor Nelson is so worried about her?" Jake asked me. "She seems rather self-sufficient to me."

"Because he's right about that inspector an' the contractor," I said. "That is, iffen he was right about what they said about that wirin' havin' rubber sheathin'."

"But how could you possibly know that, Emily?"

"Because I helped my Elmer, God rest his soul, wire our rock shop back in 'thirty-seven an' I know that original knob-an'-tube wirin' had asbestos-cloth sheathin', not rubber. Just like I know it was strung from beam to beam an' sat on top a little, doughnut-shaped, porcelain knobs nailed to those beams."

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"Maybe we should go downstairs and ask Aunt Juanita Nelson about the sheathing," Jake suggested.

"That's just what I was fixin' to do," I said.

Aunt Juanita Nelson was adamant about the cracked rubber sheathin' on her wirin'. If Misters White and Watson said it was rubber, then it had to be. An' how was I, a mere woman, to know anythin' about wirin'? She was ever bit as exasperatingly stubborn as a Missouri-born mule.

"I'll have you know I climbed that ladder myself and stuck my head through the attic crawl hole," she said. "And I can tell you that I smelled the stink of smoldering pine up there where the frayed wire sits against the beams. Why, if it weren't for Mister Watson getting up there and wrapping that wire, my building might have burned down just like our town hall did back in April."

She dramatized her words by pressing the back a her hand against her forehead an' slumpin' into her chair. I resisted the urge to ask her iffen she'd ever acted in melodramas.

"Mind iffen we have a look at that attic?" I asked.

"Suit yourself," she said.

The stink a smolderin' pine was in that attic, all right, but I'd be danged iffen I could see what was causin' it. I shined the light as far as it would reach along the wirin' an' what I seen still looked good. "Did you ever know this buildin' to have a problem with rats or mice?" I asked Juanita.

"Of course not." Her voice was indignant. "I wouldn't allow such a thing."

I turned off the flashlight an' climbed back down the ladder.

"The wirin' I can see looks just fine," I said. "An' the rest a it should be just as good as what I saw unless somethin' got to gnawin' on it. But even gnawin' wouldn't explain the stink up there, 'cause a varmint would electrocute itself before it could chew a wire deep enough to cause it to fall against a beam."

"There's nothing in that attic big enough to gnaw." Juanita was emphatic.

"Then the stink up there don't make a whole lot a sense," I said.

"May I take a look?" Jake asked.

I handed him the flashlight an' watched him climb the ladder. Then I seen him set the flashlight down, rub his fingertips over somethin', an' then sniff at his hand.

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"Someone has rubbed something on these beams," he said. "It smells like smoldering pine."

"Get down off that ladder so I can see," Aunt Juanita Nelson ordered.

Jake done what she asked an' our Missouri-born mule had a look-see for herself. Then she closed the crawl-hole cover an' come back down the ladder. She shook her head. "And to think that poor Mrs. Babic and Mrs. Wilcox each gave them a twenty-thousand-dollar deposit," she said. Then she stomped her foot an' glared at us. "And I gave them ten thousand dollars." She pursed her lips an' fisted her hands to her hips.

"I want those men arrested," she said. "I'm going to call the sheriff and tell him to arrest them."

"I think we should try to find that money first," Jake said. "If these men are as professional as I think they are, it's likely the money will disappear before the sheriff has a chance to get the proper warrants to search their rooms and their automobiles."

Aunt Juanita stood thinkin' on that for a minute. Then she nodded her head.

"Maybe some discretion is called for," she said. "Let's search their rooms first."

The search a the rooms didn't turn up any money, but we did find the source a that stink in the attic. Mr. T. J. Watson had a half a case a Grandpa's Wonder Pine Tar Toilet Soap hidden underneath his bed. One whiff a that soap told us just what had been rubbed onto them beams in our widows' attics.

"Who sells pine-tar soap around here?" I asked.

"The drugstore," Juanita said. "But I doubt that the mouse-brained twits they hire would remember who they sold that soap to."

"I don't think we'll need to prove where they bought the soap in order to get these turkeys tarred with it," I said.

For the first time since we met, Aunt Juanita Nelson smiled.

"Tarring turkeys," she said. "You know, Emily, I think I could approve of that. Now, just how are we going to do it?"

I let loose a my plan, an' each one a them added a touch or two a their own. Of course, Juanita wasn't too happy about callin' Amos McDerby to enlist his help 'cause she didn't take to eatin' crow very well, but she finally agreed to do it for the sake a the other two widows in Julian.

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Things was set to begin that night when our two turkeys come into Juanita's parlor for their usual pie an' coffee.

At twelve minutes after eight, they come saunterin' in an' sat down at the dinin'-room table with the rest a us. It didn't take more than a glance for me to tell which one a them men was which. The big, florid man wearin' the fancy leather jacket was too fat an' out a shape to be in construction, so I figured he was Inspector White. That meant the shorter, muscular man in the T-shirt an' jeans had to be T. J. Watson.

Aunt Juanita served everyone pie an' coffee. Then she introduced each a us at the table. It didn't take long for the conversation to move from pie to what everybody did for a livin'.

"I'm a building inspector for the State of California," James M. White said. "I was sent here after the town-hall fire to inspect the rubber sheathing around the wiring in all the original buildings in the state."

"I'm the electrical contractor, who will be replacing some of that wiring," T. J. Watson said.

"They're in this together," Aunt Juanita Nelson murmured.

"Are *you* still employed?" White asked Jake.

"Somewhat," Jake said. "I do consulting work now and then."

"How nice," White said. Then he asked Carlos what he did, an' Carlos told him all about hirin' out as a pilot to fly a couple here to Julian for a funeral that was to be tomorrow.

"I didn't know Julian had an airport," White said.

"It doesn't," Carlos said. "We came in by helicopter and landed on Lazy Susan Mine property just north of town."

When White looked at me, I seen a momentary drift a confusion on his face. Then he smiled into his double chin. "And do you still work, Mrs. Grady?" he asked.

"I sell soap," I said. "But I ain't the Avon Lady."

"Soap," White said. "How nice and, uh, clean of you—"

"Funny thing about the soap business," I said. "Sometimes I can go for months without a sale. Then all of a sudden I get a run on it like I got now. I guess folks is just rediscoverin' the worth of Grandpa's Wonder Pine Tar Toilet Soap, the soap that smoldered the—"

Danged iffen T. J. Watson didn't choke on his coffee. I give him a couple a hefty whacks on the back to get him breathin' right again, then I asked him iffen he was all right.

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"I'm fine. Just fine," he said.

Then he looked at James M. White, who was busy tryin' to size me up.

"You say you sell pine-tar soap?" White asked.

"Yep. Been sellin' it for better'n fifty years now. An' I can tell you, it's becomin' popular here in Julian. Why, just this afternoon when I was deliverin' three cartons to the drugstore, the owner told me he'd had a run on the stuff. Somebody bought every case he had. Then when I went back outside to my truck, I found a miner waitin' there. He went an' bought ever case a soap I had left in the truck. An' when I asked him what he was gonna do with two hundred bars a soap, he said he was gonna melt it down, mix it with tar, an' use it to help clean up a pair a no-good turkeys that's goin' around Julian bilkin' widows out a their savin's. Called it tarrin' turkeys, he did."

I paused long enough to give them men time to digest my words. Then I shed my most innocent smile on 'em.

"Tarrin' turkeys." White chewed on the words. "How colloquial. Did he mention who he was going to tar?"

"Nope, an' I didn't ask," I said. "But he did say that he an' a bunch a good ole boys was gonna get the job done around midnight tonight."

"My goodness," Aunt Juanita Nelson said, "the last time we had someone tarred and feathered in Julian was back in 'sixty-five. The poor man ended up in a hospital where they had to bathe him in kerosene and shave every bit of hair off his body. If I recall, he was selling plots in a nonexistent cemetery to the old folks around here."

James M. White pushed himself back from the table an' stood up. "I'm tired," he said. "And I do have to get up early tomorrow morning. If you will please excuse me, I think I'll go upstairs to bed."

Funny thing about tiredness. T. J. Watson seemed to catch it. His snappy eyes got all glazed an' droopy, then he stretched an' yawned an' went up to bed.

After we heard their footsteps disappear up the stairs, Aunt Juanita walked to the window an' waved to someone outside. Then she went to her apartment so's she could look through her bedroom window an' keep an eye on Misters White an' Watson's cars. Carlos stood guard near her door while Jake an' me went into the lobby an' hid behind the front counter.

Less than a hour later, we heard the stairs creakin' an' knowed they was headed down. The creakin' gave way to soft scuffin' on the carpet in the lobby, then we heard the back door open an' close.

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It took less than five minutes for them two men to skedaddle back inside.

"Good God," White said, "there must be fifteen of them out there! Drinking, joking, carrying on about tar and feathers!"

"What are we going to do?" T. J. asked.

I edged to the side a the counter an' seen Carlos Guerra walk out a the parlor an' stop.

"I thought you two had gone up to bed," Carlos said.

James White shed a designing look on Carlos. "Something has disturbed that," he said. "Something that might prove very profitable to you."

"Well," Carlos allowed, "I'm always interested in profits."

The three men came together in front a the counter an' started talkin' in hushed whispers. Then they headed for the front door. I heard it open. "It's a long walk, gentlemen," Carlos said. "But then it's a nice warm night for walking."

When we heard the door click shut, Jake an' me hurried out the back door an' into the alley where Amos McDerby an' his good ole boys was loiterin' around a pair a pickup trucks. "They're on their way!" I said.

"Jeremiah," Amos McDerby said to the man on his right, "you keep most of the boys here to make sure they don't try circling back. I'll take Backbreaker Adams here along to keep us old timers out of trouble." Then he grinned at Jake an' me an' slapped a rough-looking bruiser on the shoulder. "This good ole boy can outwork, outfight, an' outsmart any miner in these parts," he said. "He was the best defensive end Julian High School ever had."

Amos McDerby drove the back roads to the Lazy Susan Mine, parked in front a her entrance, an' got out a the car. "I'll go light the lanterns we'll be needing," he said. "You'll find the rifles and a flashlight underneath the front seat."

Backbreaker Adams pulled a pair a rifles an' a flashlight out from under the front seat a the car. He handed the flashlight to me an' give one a the rifles to Jake. "I'll take the inside of the chopper," he said. "You back me up from the row of junkers."

He walked over to the helicopter.

I seen the light inside the chopper flick on when he opened the door an' climbed inside. I seen it go off again when he shut the door. Jake an' me hid behind one a them dilapidated cars that was near the front a the mine.

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Fifteen minutes later, Carlos brung them turkeys in for pluckin'. He walked them on over to the chopper, opened the door, an' jumped back out a the way just as Backbreaker raised his rifle an' jumped out a the chopper.

White an' Watson froze in their tracks, but Carlos kept inchin' backward until he was standin' beside Jake an' me. I shined my flashlight on the chopper.

Two sets a hands began reachin' for the sky.

"Turn around nice and slow," Backbreaker said. "Good. Now start walking toward the light."

The two men followed orders an' squinted in the bright light from the flashlight. When they reached me, Adams marched them on past an' into the mine. Jake an' Carlos an' me followed them until they came to the end a the tunnel, where lighted kerosene lanterns were hung on the shorin' timbers for the hoist pulley. They was an open shaft in front a them an' a six-by-six engine room to their right.

Amos McDerby was standin' inside that room beside the main drum a the hoist engine. He was runnin' his hand along the cable strung from the drum up through the pulley an' then down to a large hoist bucket suspended above the open shaft. "Welcome to the Lazy Susan Mine," he said. "Emily, I think you and Jake should step over here. Carlos can stay where he is."

Me an' Jake walked to the right a the shaft an' stood beside Amos, facin' the turkeys.

"You," White said. "You." Then somethin' inside a him seemed to harden, makin' his whole body stiffen.

"Where's the money, gentlemen?" I asked.

"What money?" White sneered.

"The fifty thousand dollars in down payments T.J. over there stole from the widows," I said.

"I have no idea what you're talking about," the fat man said. "Do you, Theodore?"

Watson turned his cool eyes on me.

"No," he said.

I picked up a rock an' tossed it into the shaft in front a them. It bounced against the walls an' then splashed into water. "Think you can lower that bucket a might?" I asked Amos.

"All I *can* do is lower it," he said. " 'Cause it takes the engine to pull it up again and the engine ain't working."

"Then lower it about six feet," I said, "so's it's low enough to the ground to let these two turkeys climb inside it."

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Amos squeezed the handle on the brake an' the bucket fell a good six feet until its rim was even with the floor a the tunnel.

"Get into the bucket," I ordered.

When White stood his ground, I took the rifle from Jake an' fired a bullet past his head into a wooden support beam behind him. The percussion knocked rocks out a the ceilin' above the pulley beam an' sent 'em splatterin' into the water in the shaft. "I hit what I aim at," I said. I lifted the rifle an' sighted down the barrel at James M. White's right ear.

The two men eased themselves into that hoist bucket. "Where's the money?" I asked again.

"James," Watson said.

"She isn't going to kill us," White said. "She's not that crazy."

Watson sealed his lips an' stared at me.

I walked over to where Amos stood an' I handed him my rifle. "Iffen they try to climb out a that barrel, shoot 'em," I said.

"It'll be my pleasure, Emily," he said.

I grabbed hold a the handle to the hoist brake.

"Emily—" Jake's voice was calm "—if you are going to do what I think you are, then please make sure you don't get caught again. I should hate to see you have to spend another six months in a mental hospital."

No sooner did he say that than I give that brake handle a quick squeeze, releasin' enough cable from the hoist to lower the bucket a good two feet. It bounced to a stop an' T. J. Watson grabbed hold a the square timberin' on the rim a the shaft to stop the swayin' a the bucket. He kept a white-knuckle hold on that shorin' even after the bucket was steady. "What do you mean she's not that crazy?" he shouted at White.

James M. White never said a word.

"I ain't gonna get caught this time, Jake." I kept my voice low an' even. "They's fifty foot a water in that shaft to sink the bodies in."

I let the bucket fall another foot.

Panic was creepin' into T.J.'s eyes, but his partner just stood there, darin' me to continue. I wiped the sweat from my hand on my jeans an' met his gaze.

"For God's sake," T.J. shouted, "tell the old broad where the money is!"

Beads a sweat was beginnin' to form on White's forehead, but he kept his lips sealed.

"Maybe *you'd* better tell me where it is," I said to T.J. " 'Cause

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iffen I have to squeeze this brake one more time, I'm gonna let that bucket go all the way to the bottom. Then I'm gonna blow out all these lanterns an' let you drown down there in the dark."

"Then where will you get the money to pay back all those poor widows?" White hurled the question at me.

So that's what he had up his sleeve, that's what made him think I wouldn't do what I was threatenin'.

"Right here," I said. I dug my wad a money out a my pocket an' handed it to Jake. "Count it," I said.

You could hear grains a sand fallin' to the earth, that room got so quiet. White's eyes kept movin' from me to Jake an' back again.

"Fifty-two thousand, one hundred and three dollars," Jake said.

"But you wouldn't," White said. "That must be all the money you have in the world. What if you get sick or injured or—"

"That ain't but a smidgen a what I got," I interrupted him. "So iffen you men want to drown over it, I'll be more than happy to oblige you." I put my right hand on the brake an' looked Watson square in the eye.

"I don't know where he hid the money!" he shouted. "Honest to God, I don't know! Please, lady, please—I don't know!"

I put both hands on the handle.

"Tell her where it is, James!" T. J. shouted. "For God's sake, tell her!"

I looked from him to White. "I always did have a taste for justice," I said.

"It's in the lining," White said. He whipped off his jacket an' threw it up onto the floor a the tunnel. "There's a hole in the right pocket. I used it to push the money into the lining."

He didn't have to explain he had distributed the money evenly around the back a the jacket 'cause Jake had already cut the linin' open an' the money was lyin' there on the ground. I walked over to where Jake stood. When I looked from the money to James M. White, I seen confusion on the fat man's face.

"You wouldn't have done it," he said. "Would you?"

"I don't know," I said. "I reckon you didn't give me the chance to find out." I turned to Amos. "They're all yours," I said.

Jake an' Carlos an' me took the money back to the guesthouse, where Aunt Juanita Nelson was waitin'. We spread it on her dinin'-room table.

"Shouldn't we call the sheriff?" she asked.

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"An' get us all arrested for kidnapin', false imprisonment, an' attempted murder?" I said. "No, I think you better leave Mister White an' Mister Watson to Amos McDerby an' his friends."

"But I wouldn't want them to do anything that would get Amos into—"

"Don't you worry 'bout Amos," I said. "He's too smart to do anythin' that'd get him in any real trouble."

"I hope you're right," she said.

It was Amos who come to pick us up from the guesthouse the next mornin'. An' when he met up with Juanita, all her bravado melted into a mixture a pride an' thankfulness an' good, old-fashioned regret. "You didn't harm those men, did you, Amos?" she asked.

"Naw," he said. "Me and the boys give each one a them a bar a pine-tar soap to remember us by and let them drive away. Last time I seen them, they was speeding down Highway 78."

"Amos," she said, "will you ever forgive me?"

"We'll discuss that after I drive these folks back to their helicopter," he said.

"I'll have pie and coffee waiting for you," she said.

Amos McDerby smiled all the way to the helicopter.

Dr. Nelson was waitin' for us when we landed at the Wickenburg Municipal Airport. Seein' him standin' there brung a momentary flutter a doubt to my heart. I couldn't help wonderin' iffen he would approve a the way I got his job done or not.

Carlos shut down the engine an' Jake opened the passenger door. When I stepped out, Dr. Nelson shed a warm smile on me. "How can I ever thank you?" he said. "My aunt telephoned to tell me what you did."

"But did she tell you how I done it?" I asked.

Seriousness melted the smile from the doctor's face.

"Emily," he said firmly, "this time justice was mine. Just like justice was yours so long ago. I have no regrets—and neither should you."

Then he winked at Jake. "Besides," he added, "you have too much to live for in the present to waste time fretting over the past."

When I looked up at Jake, he was positively grinnin'. "Emily," he said, "it looks like you've just run out of excuses. So how about letting me test my luck with you in Ireland?"

I looked up at the handsome face a my gigolo an' my heart got to

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flipfloppin' in my chest. No regrets, I thought. No excuses. No—what the heck, Em, you only live once.

"I've always wanted to test the luck a an Irishman in Ireland," I said. "But I wonder just what ya'd consider lucky, Jake."

He wrapped an arm around my shoulder an' pulled me close. "You, Emily," he said. "You're my luck and you always will be."

DETECTIVERSE

HEMMED-IN

by MONICA DALE

There once was a seamstress named Tess,
Who concealed cocaine in her dress,
Till the day she forgot
To tie a tight knot
And the goods all fell out—quite a mess.

Tess's deceit was now known.
Since her artful cover was blown,
She was easily caught
And her work was for naught—
The authorities reaped what she'd sewn.

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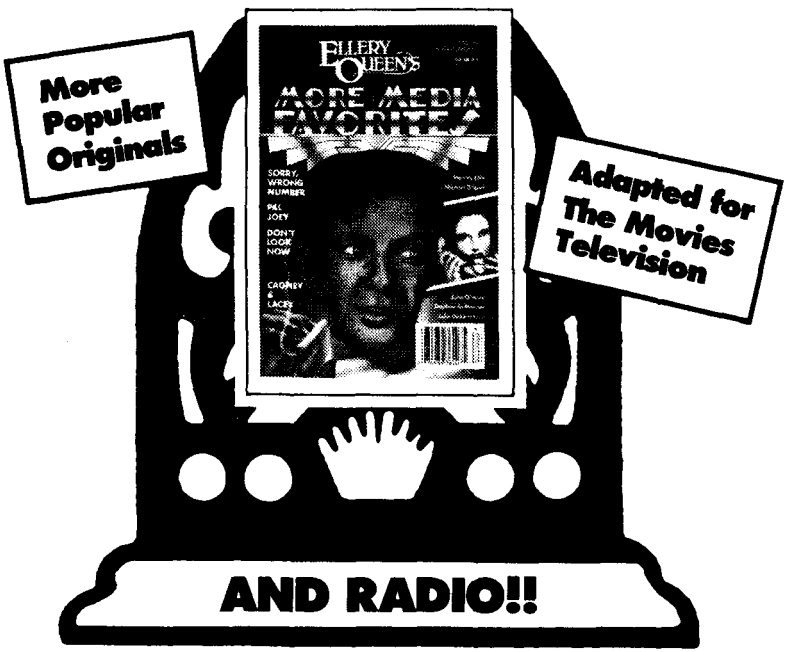

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

One reflection of the recent crime-and-mystery boom is the number of outstanding new writers entering the field. Another is the existence of smaller regional publishers presenting books that often match and sometimes exceed in quality of content and packaging those from the major New York houses. The first eight titles below are all first mysteries, some from small presses, and each offers a welcome new authorial voice.

*** Mary Lou Bennett: *Murder Once Done,* Perseverance Press (distributed by Capra Press, P.O. Box 2068, Santa Barbara, CA 93120), $8.95. A small town on the Oregon coast makes an ideal setting for a terrorized-household novel along the lines of Joseph Hayes' *The Desperate Hours.* This time the household consists of three elderly widows of longstanding friendship but very different temperaments who have just set up housekeeping together; the terrorizer is a paranoid youth; and law enforcement is represented by female police chief Chris Kirksey, whom I hope we'll meet again. The action is well staged, the characters beautifully developed. If there's a movie, there are three terrific parts for older actresses.

*** Lora R. Smith: *Revolting Development,* Perseverance Press, $8.95. In Palo Alto, California, a widely hated condominium developer is found dead in a dumpster and housewife Bridget Montrose turns amateur detective, assisting a police detective saddled by his mystery-reading parents with the name Paul Drake. (Many readers are bound to picture the late William Hopper in the role.) A solid whodunit.

*** Archer Mayor: *Open Season,* Putnam, $17.95. In an ambitious procedural set in Brattleboro, Vermont, Lieutenant Joe Gunther investigates a series of crimes involving jurors in a murder trial of three years before, and, despite official resistance, takes a fresh look at the case. He seeks two adversaries: the real killer of Kimberly Harris, for whose murder a black janitor was imprisoned, and the mysterious ski-masked figure who will go to any extreme to get the case reopened. The reader's credibility is sometimes strained, but the case is well told and involves both exciting action sequences and real scientific detective work.

*** Michael Tolkin: *The Player,* Atlantic Monthly Press, $17.95. Devotees of the Hollywood novel will certainly enjoy the chillingly believable portrait of studio executive Griffin Mill, a man who thinks in movie pitches and approaches life like a scenario. Worried about his job and by a series of anonymous postcards, he becomes both a murderer and a victim of attempted murder. A fine novel even

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if, in mystery-story terms at least, the ending proves a major letdown.

*** John McAleer: *Coign of Vantage; or the Boston Athenaeum Murders,* Foul Play/Countryman, $16.95. The first mystery of Rex Stout's biographer is ideal for readers whose favorites are Amanda Cross and Michael Innes and who would enjoy John Dickson Carr even without the locked rooms. Members of Boston's exclusive Cart-Tail Club are dying mysteriously, and prospective member Austin Layman, probabilities expert and Emerson biographer, investigates. Besides an ornate plot (to match the writing style) and some amusingly quirky characters, look for McAleer's description of the most revolting breakfast-cereal gimmick imaginable. Some will find the arch hero/girlfriend dialogue and the incessant punning a bit hard to take, but I had too much fun to carp.

*** J. N. Catanach: *White Is the Color of Death,* Foul Play/Countryman, $16.95. Charles Quint, professor at a midwestern university, is vacationing on a Malaysian island where an anthropologist has recently been murdered. Some of his oddly assorted fellow tourists prove to be members of a British Army unit who saw combat in the area some years before. Quint is himself a somewhat mysterious figure of unspecified nationality—and if he is really just a tourist, why does he leap into ostensibly amateur detective work almost immediately and get the other cast members to pour their hearts out to him so readily? Whether that's adequately explained or not, this is a good story, well told. (In an original touch, Quint compares solving a mystery not to the traditional jigsaw puzzle but to laying a wall-to-wall carpet.)

** Gerry Maddren: *The Case of the Johannisberg Riesling,* Cliffhanger Press, P.O. Box 29527, Oakland, Ca 94604–9527; $13.95 hc, $7.95 pa. Not-very-hardboiled L.A. private eye Jerry Cool investigates murders in the Northern California wine country and his former hometown of San Francisco. Some plot turns make suspension of disbelief tough, and I was hoping for a stronger winemaking background, but occasional good narrative and character touches give hope for Cool's next case.

** A. E. Eddenden: *A Good Year for Murder,* Academy Chicago, $15.95. As 1940 dawns on Fort York, Ontario, someone is after the city council members, first with pranks, then with murders, all committed on holidays major and obscure. Inspector Albert Thretheway's first case is strictly for laughs (it's amazing a writer of the 1980s could create a cop as dumb and buffoonish as Chief Zulp) and not all the gags work. But if your favorite mystery writer (like mine) is Ellery Queen, you're bound to get a kick out of Eddenden's use of the calendar.

****Bill Pronzini: *Shackles,* St. Martin's, $16.95. The author's "Nameless" mysteries have great variety, and this ingenious entry is the most unusual of the lot, as well as one of the best. Chained to

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a wall in a snowbound mountain cabin by a ski-masked figure and left with enough provisions to last about thirteen weeks, Nameless must first engineer an escape as seemingly impossible as Jacques Futrelle's "Problem of Cell 13," then identify and track down his faceless enemy.

*** Margaret Yorke: *Speak for the Dead,* Viking, $16.95. A reliable British suspense specialist manages a large cast in typically expert fashion. Among the players: charming but amoral Carrie, who leads a triple life as provincial wife, London prostitute, and a naive young student's adored girlfriend; her abusive husband Gordon, who served prison time for manslaughter in the death of his first wife; and a private detective trying to locate the husband for the first wife's father. There is a fine ironic twist midway and another at the end. If you can predict where this one's going, you're good!

***Harold Adams: *The Man Who Met the Train,* Mysterious Press, $15.95. Thirties sign painter and private eye Carl Wilcox is passing through Tocqueville, South Dakota, when he pulls a four-year-old survivor out of a wrecked car where her mother and two others have died. Wilcox investigates the crash and the earlier death of the child's father, a drunken genius who walked into a train. If you've heard Tom Bodett's radio commercials for Motel 6, that's the perfect voice to go with the laconic narration of Wilcox. Note: see page 125 for a strong feminist statement coming from a Depression-era male voice.

*** Richard Rosen: *Saturday Night Dead,* Viking, $16.95. The third case of ballplayer-turned-private-eye Harvey Blissberg, in which he nursemaids a heavy-drinking Boston Red Sox star set to guest-host the live Saturday-night show *Last Laughs,* makes as good use of a comedy-writing background as the author's Edgar-winning *Strike Three You're Dead* did of baseball. Well written, well plotted, and often very funny, it still could have profited from some pruning.

*** Marilyn Wallace: *Primary Target,* Bantam, $3.50. The campaign of presidential frontrunner Jean Talbot is opposed by a terrorist group called the Brotherhood of Men in the second novel about Oakland cops Carlos Cruz and Jay Goldstein. This political procedural does a good job of capturing how claustrophobic a run for top office must be and offers a climax calculated to satisfy old mystery-movie buffs. A very involving story makes the preachiness of the finale easy to forgive.

** Joseph Telushkin: *The Final Analysis of Dr. Stark,* Bantam, $3.50. Fans of Harry Kemelman's Rabbi Small should enjoy a new rabbi-detective, Daniel Winter, whose second case is a gloriously pure whodunit. L.A. psychiatrist Noah Stark is found dead on his own couch, brained with a statue, and *everybody* had a motive. The one problem in an otherwise enjoyable book: the main clue to the killer is so obvious, it's incredible nobody thinks of it sooner.

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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

"What are you thinking, Barney?" Yvonne asked.
"I'm thinking about mercy killing."
"But you're a very religious man. Wouldn't killing be a sin?"
"It would be if I deliberately went out and shot a guy I hated or something like that. But if a person was dying and suffering, why, I'd be committing a blessing, not a sin . . ."

THE MAN WHO SLEW TOO MUCH

by GEORGE BAXT

Intelligence had never been Barney Sunshine's strong suit. He was a dull man of ordinary origins, an only child. He was said to have bored his parents to death and spent his formative years in an orphanage in East Colitis, New Jersey, where he was born. No relative would have him. He wasn't even cute. Having nothing to offer, Barney expected nothing in return, so he became a garbage collector.

He sometimes wondered if garbage was at the root of his illness. Dr. Lindsay said it was quite possible: in the course of his work, he inhaled a variety of noxious odors. Nurse DuPay, Yvonne DuPay of the generous hips, sensuous lips, and threatening breasts, clucked her tongue with sympathy as Dr. Lindsay doomed Barney to a slow but certain death.

"Six months?"

Barney blinked his eyes as Dr. Lindsay nodded his head.

"Give or take a week or two," said the suave Dr. Lindsay, who harbored a secret desire to serve in Beverly Hills.

"Hm," murmured Barney. "Six months. Well, it's better than a

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poke in the eye." Barney was a disciple of the Pollyanna the Glad Girl school of philosophy. "A man can accomplish a lot in six months."

"Such as?" asked the doctor, the perpetual spoilsport.

"Oh, I dunno. Something. I never did amount to much, but there's still time. Shall I continue the medication?"

"Well, why not," said the doctor with a chuckle. "Can't hurt."

Barney slapped his knee and laughed, while doctor and nurse exchanged an oblique glance.

An hour later, Barney and Nurse DuPay were nursing beers in a local bar. "Thank you for having this drink with me, Miss DuPay."

"Yvonne."

Barney blushed.

"For heaven's sake, we've known each other for months now, Barney."

Barney's blush deepened. He took a swig of beer and wiped his mouth on his jacket sleeve. "You know, Yvonne—" she smiled "—I was thinking about something you said to me that night you helped me lose my virginity."

Yvonne's brows were either furrowed or knitted, depending on your powers of description. "What did I say?"

"You said that artist, the one who painted soup cans and suckered the world into thinking they were art—"

"Andy Warhol."

"Yeah, him. He said, you said, that every person has their fifteen minutes of fame."

"That's right. I read it in the *Reader's Digest* and they are certainly reliable."

"Well, I'm thinking. I have six months, give or take a week or so, to get my fifteen minutes. I certainly won't get it collecting garbage."

"No, only television producers succeed at that."

"You know, I'd like to do something for my fellow man."

"Barney, that's real sweet." She demolished a handful of peanuts. "What do you have in mind?"

"I don't know. There must be something I can contribute to humanity. There's so much suffering in the world. If I could do something to help ease the pain and suffering of my fellow creatures before—"

"You mean like mercy killing?"

Barney stared into his glass of beer.

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"You could get life for that."

"Hot damn!" Barney howled with laughter. "I could get life! Well, that's a fair trade for six months, give or take a week!"

Yvonne put her hand over one of Barney's. "You're so brave, Barney Sunshine. Sunshine's a perfect name for you. Are there other Sunshines out there who live up to the warm quality of their name?"

"I don't know, and I sure don't have the time to find out." He stared at the ceiling for a while and Yvonne wondered if he was counting fly specks.

"What are you thinking, Barney?"

"I'm thinking about mercy killing."

"But you're a very religious man. Wouldn't killing be a sin?"

"It would be if I deliberately went out and shot a guy I hated or something like that. But if a person was dying and suffering, why, I'd be committing a blessing, not a sin. —Yvonne?"

"What?"

"When the end comes, can I expect to suffer much?"

"*Quien sabe?*" Yvonne once had a Mexican lover—a few words of the language were all he left her.

Barney slammed a fist on the table. "People shouldn't have to suffer! Haven't we suffered enough? Drought, famine, incurable diseases like mine, the Reagans." He shook his head slowly and his eyes misted. "People shouldn't have to suffer."

They discussed mercy killings far into the night and much of the next morning, it being Saturday and neither of them working weekends. Yvonne told Barney he was beginning to look noble.

"You really think so?"

"You're beginning to look like a great humanitarian. You know, like Pasteur and Einstein and Phil Donahue."

Nobly, Barney went to the hall closet, opened it, reached to the top shelf, and brought down a long narrow wooden object.

"What's that?" asked Yvonne.

"It's a blow gun."

"A blow gun? Where'd you get a blow gun?"

"It was my father's. He was a sailor." Barney placed the blow gun on the table and carried a chair back to the closet. "He brought it back from South America." He stood on the chair and rummaged around until he found a wooden box. He hopped from the chair, brought the box to the table, and opened it.

Yvonne stared at the contents with subdued curiosity. "Those look like darts," she said. "What's in that brown bottle?"

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"Poison."

"Are you sure?"

"Very sure. You dip the darts into the poison and then you blow them at something—or someone—and, whammo, it works real fast." He smiled the smile of a saint. "Very quick and very merciful."

Yvonne's heart was beating Ravel's *Bolero*. She whispered his name. "Barney."

Barney's eyes linked with hers. "Oh, I never killed anybody. Just rats and a neighbor's pesky pit bull."

Yvonne took the blow gun in her hand and rolled it around, as though testing the quality of an expensive cigar. "Myrtle Fassbinder."

"Myrtle—?"

"Fassbinder. It would be a blessing to use this on Myrtle Fassbinder."

"How come?"

"She's in such terrible agony, not even drugs can help her."

Little beads of perspiration formed on Barney's forehead. "It would be a blessing to help her cross over, would it?" His voice was hoarse and unnatural and ugly, like a country western singer's.

"A little nudge would indeed be a blessing."

Barney took the blow gun from Yvonne and held it up to an eye. "Clean as a whistle in there."

"There she is. That's Myrtle Fassbinder."

Barney and Yvonne sat in the front seat of Barney's overused car, Barney behind the wheel. Myrtle was in her garden pulling weeds, wearing a sunbonnet and trilling away merrily and atonally. "Isn't she a brave little thing, trilling and weeding like that?" Under his breath, Barney whistled "Have You Ever Crossed Over to Sneden's?"

A few minutes later, Myrtle Fassbinder yelled, "Ouch!" She pulled the poisoned dart from her neck and said out loud, "Now whose idea of a funny joke is this?" And, clutching the dart, she keeled over dead, her face in the basket of weeds.

As they drove away from the scene of the mercy killing, Barney cried, "Hallelujah!"

"Amen!" shouted Yvonne.

"I feel good," said Barney, a beatific expression on his face. "I feel that God truly loves me. I have cleansed my fellow man of pain and sorrow."

"Look how you look! Just look how you look! A Botticelli saint!"

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"I feel that the good Lord is reserving a special place for me in heaven."

"I know he is." Yvonne cleared her throat. "Ogden Armbruster."

"Ogden—"

"Armbruster. Three years of agony and now he's addicted to the pain-killing drugs he can no longer afford."

"Aren't you wonderful, knowing all these people who need my kind and thoughtful ministrations?"

"Barney, I work for a doctor."

"There, you see? I've never been smart. Why didn't I guess right off how come you know all these people who can avail of my friendly persuasion? Ogden Armbruster. Right fancy name, that. Where's Ogden? And don't say Utah!" Once again Barney was off into gales of laughter.

They found Ogden behind the counter of his outdoor fast-food restaurant. Ogden was fat and looked jolly and Barney suspected he ate more than he sold.

"Ogden looks healthy to me," he commented.

"Steroids."

"Oh."

"Inhale, Barney. Exhale, Barney."

Ogden Armbruster thought he'd been stung by a wasp. He stared down at his ample chest and saw the tiny dart protruding from just under his left pectoral. "Now what the hell—" He plucked out the dart and stared at it in the palm of his hand. He remained in that position as the poison swiftly paralyzed his system.

Five days and three more mercy killings later, Detective Clark Rendell stared at the coroner. "You trying to tell me there's some South American savage running around town killing people with poisoned darts? Damn it, I keep telling them we got to tighten up our immigration laws!"

"I haven't seen anyone around town resembling a savage, but somebody's got a blow gun, a supply of darts, and a bottle of poison—something like curare or inee or one of those other exotic poisons you find in crossword puzzles."

"But why kill these five?"

"Why not? Might as well kill them as anybody else. Any link between the five of them *you* know of?"

"I'm working on that."

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"You better work a little harder, Clark. East Colitis is in an uproar. My housekeeper has left town with her daughters Bulimia and Anorexia—and, let me tell you, she was one hell of a good housekeeper."

"Poisoned darts—ain't that a hot one?"

Barney lay on the living-room floor, the newspapers spread about him, reading and rereading the headlines aloud. "But that's not fair!" he cried. "It's not fair! What I'm doing is for the benefit of mankind. I'm *not* a fiend! I'm *not* a heartless murderer! Darn dash it, Yvonne, if I'm anything I'm all heart!"

"I know you are, darling," she comforted him. "Never mind, after you're gone they'll know the truth of your mission of mercy."

Barney got to his feet and sat down next to her on the sagging davenport. "Yvonne, are you saying that you'll see to it that I'll be rightly glorified and exalted after I've gone to collect my reward?"

"Cross my heart."

"Yvonne, I pray there is an afterlife so I will know you through all eternity."

"Melanie Lindsay."

"Melanie—?"

"Lindsay."

"Lindsay? Any relation to Doctor Lindsay?"

"Yes, darling," said Yvonne, her voice cloaked in sadness and despair, "his desperately ill wife."

"Oh, no. Not the doctor's wife! Of what is she dying?"

"Something unpronounceable."

"It's that bad?"

"Very bad. She could linger for years. The doctor puts such a brave face on it—"

"He sure does. I'd never guess from that jolly way he has of telling me just five months and three more weeks left, give or take a week. —I'm running low on poison darts," he added sadly.

"Just Melanie and a tired old man who lives in a mansion on the outskirts of town and we can call it quits for a while, Barney. You know, what with this intensified police investigation, it might be a good idea to go to earth for a while, anyway—until things sort of die down. No pun intended."

"Judging from the hue and cry in the papers, I guess you're right." He looked at Yvonne. "I suppose we'll find Mrs. Lindsay easy enough."

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"Oh, yes. She has her hair done every Thursday afternoon, and this being Thursday afternoon there's no time like the present, dear."

Melanie Lindsay's funeral was quiet and dignified. The coffin was open and the deceased looked lovely, or so commented most of those who filed past the coffin. One woman commented to another, "Trust Melanie to get herself killed the day she had her hair done. Look at her. You'd think she was posing for *Vogue.*"

Barney crossed to the doctor, who took his hand and said warmly, "Thank you, Barney, thank you."

"For what?"

"Er—for coming to the funeral."

"It's the least I could do, Doctor, after all you've done for me."

Barney moved on as a woman spoke to Doctor Lindsay. "These dreadful murders! Believe me, Venable dear, if it wasn't Melanie, I wouldn't budge from the house. Who knows where the poison-dart killer will strike next?"

Barney resisted the urge to reassure her there would be no more mercy killings for a while—just that crotchety old man in the mansion who, Yvonne reassured Barney, was suffering from a fatal case of chronic bends. He looked around the room for Yvonne but didn't see her. He turned back to the doctor and said, "I don't see Nurse DuPay. Isn't she here?"

"She's at her lawyer's office," Lindsay told him. "It seems some relative died and left her a fortune."

"Are you kidding?"

"Would *I* kid *you?*"

"Well, knock me down with a limp noodle. Well, why not? It's nice of the Almighty to repay her for the good we've done. I'll get my reward in about five months and a week or so, give or take. I am blessed!"

"Barney Sunshine?"

Barney turned but did not recognize the man who addressed him. "That's me."

"Do you recognize this?"

Barney stared at the blow gun Detective Rendell was holding. "Yes," he said softly, "I recognize this instrument of the Lord."

"I'd like you to come down to headquarters with me and answer a few questions."

Doctor Lindsay stared at the detective and then focused his eyes on Barney. Barney looked positively beatific . . .

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Barney's trial was months off and, behind bars, he reveled in his fifteen minutes of fame. He continued to make headlines and had been featured on television. People still spoke with amusement of his interview on *Sixty Minutes* and of the screamingly funny segment on another hour show with a newscaster who kept asking him about his "merthy killingth."

There was a great deal of adverse and shocked comment when he was allowed a guest stint on the soap opera, *Love of Life,* and now he had a writer working with him on his autobiography, for which a publisher was paying a million-dollar advance. (Barney's lawyers were fighting the Son of Sam ruling which forbade a murderer to receive payment for a book about his crime.) The writer, Mordecai Pembroke-Smythe (Barney was impressed by the hyphen, as was Mordecai), was nagging away: "You have no idea who tipped off the police that you owned the blow gun?"

"I truly don't. It *could* have been my landlady—she's always snooping around everybody's apartment. She's denied it, but—"

"Have you heard from Yvonne DuPay since she married Doctor Lindsay and they went to live in Brazil?"

"Oh, yes. She sent a basket of fruit and some mystery paperbacks."

"Weren't you surprised she was the sole heir to the fortune left by that rich old man who lived in the mansion outside of town? Your last victim?"

Barney corrected him. "My last mercy killing. No, I had no idea he was her grandfather."

"And you didn't know the other—mercy killings—were co-beneficiaries in the old man's will?"

Barney clasped his hands together. "I only know that I performed a service under the guidance of the good Lord. And I shall soon thank Him in person."

"How? Even if you're convicted, there's no death penalty in this state. And, anyway, your lawyers are pleading insanity—and, buddy boy, my money's on them."

"Mordecai, I have but two months and three weeks, give or take a week—"

"Two months and three weeks give or take a week to do what?"

"To live. Don't you know I'm terminally ill?"

"You're fit as a bull fiddle."

"No, I'm not. Doctor Lindsay pronounced my doom three months and one week ago."

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"Barney, I've seen the prison's medical file on you. There's nothing wrong with you. You're a very healthy specimen."

Tears welled up in Barney's eyes. He clasped his hands together and kept repeating over and over again, "Oh my, oh my, oh my." The writer remained silent, recognizing a struggle with a demon when he saw one.

Then Barney crossed to the barred window and looked out and up at the sky. "Yvonne," he said. "Whatever you've done, I thank you for giving me my fifteen minutes."

DETECTIVERSE

HAPPY ENDING

by RENA GARTER KUNIS

He planned to practice larceny—
The bonds he stole were fake.
His effort next was arsony—
The blaze just wouldn't take.
And as a hit man, too, he failed—
His problem was just this:
Each time he thought his mark was nailed,
He wouldn't hit, he'd miss.
At every crime to which he'd strive,
He'd make a hopeless mess—
So he got a job from nine to five
And was a huge success.

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a special reprint by

NAN HAMILTON

"Too Many Pebbles," the first of Nan Hamilton's series of stories about Los Angeles police detective Sam Ohara, appeared in EQMM's September 1978 Department of Second Stories. Lieutenant Ohara emerged as the feature character in a new TV series on ABC in January 1987. For more about Ohara on TV, see our cover and page 113 . . .

TOO MANY PEBBLES

by NAN HAMILTON

Lieutenant Sam Ohara, Robbery-Homicide, sat at his desk brooding over the photographs of Ricky Zalba, deceased, sprawled on his back like a discarded rag doll. Police flashbulbs had preserved every grisly detail in sharpest outline, but the photographs added little to what the lieutenant had observed on the scene at six o'clock that morning. The body lay, arms outflung, half on a driveway and half on the damp earth of a vacant lot. A blood-tipped switchblade was frozen into the right hand, while the left hand seemed to claw for life in agonized desperation.

The lab reports contributed what he had already surmised. Zalba's skull had been fractured, his larynx and chest crushed. It was almost as if he had been run over by a car. But there were no abrasions, his expensive sportscoat was not torn, and there were no tire marks. The only unusual marks near the body were two deep parallel indentations in the earth.

Lieutenant Ohara studied the pictures again and noted the measurements. The upper indentation was five inches long by one and one-quarter inches wide, the lower one was four and three-quarter inches long by one and one-half inches wide. They had been driven into the ground to a depth of almost two inches.

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The remaining information was sparse. The body had been discovered by a milkman at 5:30 A.M. A canvass of the neighborhood shortly afterward had turned up no witnesses. The final notation on the lab report was a little more helpful. They had discovered a derivative of sesame oil on the victim's left hand, and shattered glass and metal fragments under the victim's heel that might have been the remains of a woman's watch.

Half heard voices in the hallway broke his concentration and Ohara sat back in resigned exasperation as he caught the words.

"This where I'll find Lieutenant O'Hara?" Evidently Reagan, the desk sergeant, was breaking in a new recruit. Bob Wiseman, from Vice next door, was helping things along.

"The Irishman, O'Hara? He's in there."

Seconds later, a sandy-haired patrol officer glanced past the lieutenant and around the otherwise empty room. Ohara looked up.

"Yes?"

"I'm looking for Lieutenant O'Hara. Sergeant Reagan asked me to drop off this file."

"I'm Ohara." The lieutenant stood up, an impressive six feet tall with football shoulders.

"But you're a Jap—" Ohara's smooth ivory face was very still and his black eyes were hard. "I mean"—the young officer stammered his confusion—"you're not Irish, sir. —Are you?"

Ohara's eyes relented. "Nope. Ohara is a good old Japanese name. We just don't use the Irish apostrophe."

The patrolman looked miserable. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Don't be. Reagan likes to have his fun." Ohara took the manila folder and put it on his desk. The officer, still flushed with embarrassment, was almost out the door when Ohara remarked, *"Arigato gozaimashita,"* and then erased the patrolman's startled expression when he added, "Just 'thank you,' in Japanese."

The little scene played out, Ohara sat down, recalling how he had bristled the first time the boys had pulled it on him. As a third-generation Japanese-American, he was still sensitive to slurs. But he had come to realize the rough camaraderie in it and now went along good-naturedly with the department joke.

He recognized, too, that his sensitivity was a byproduct of his background. He had come out of high school with the typical American imprint—a good athlete and as fond of hamburgers and hot dogs as of sukiyaki. He was too young to remember the internment

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camp during World War II, but he'd heard his parents and grandparents talk about it.

He spoke better Japanese than most Japanese-Americans simply because his family had always used both languages interchangeably.

Ohara had learned early in life that when you are one of the so-called "quiet" minorities, your only chance is to be better than good, or else take what's left. So after his service in Viet Nam, he'd used his GI bill for a Masters in Police Science and eventually joined the L.A. Police Department.

He picked up the photos again and stared at the puzzling indentations. The answer was there, he was sure, but he couldn't grasp it. He considered the victim. Zalba's four-page rap sheet for assault and narcotics violations offered possibilities. But it wasn't that kind of killing, not that straightforward. Absently, Ohara looked at his watch. He was off duty and should be leaving, since he'd promised his wife Peggy that he'd be home in time for an early supper. Their son Jim was in his first football game and wanted his parents there.

Gathering the pictures and reports, Ohara put them into his desk, wondering how he was going to tell Peggy that he couldn't go to her grandfather's birthday celebration tomorrow. She would be very disappointed. He hated to miss it himself, since Grandfather Takahashi, black-belt Aikido master, had been his teacher in that powerful martial art. In fact, it had been in Takahashi's Aikido class that Ohara had literally fallen for Peggy.

As he got into his car in the parking lot, he decided to stop in and see his old teacher, though nowadays he thought of him as *Ojiisan* (grandfather). It wasn't far to the small house in Crenshaw, and before long he pulled up in front of the neatly fenced yard and went through the gate, taking the pebbled path around the house to the back. *Ojiisan* would probably be enjoying his quiet Japanese garden at this time of day.

And he was, looking like a picture of old Japan in his favorite dark kimono, which seemed so right with his ascetic face and erect bearing.

Ojiisan greeted his favorite pupil with a welcoming smile. They exchanged the polite inquiries of civilized conversation and turned to admire the master's prize collection of bonsai trees. Ohara marveled that although the old man would be seventy-five tomorrow, he looked a vigorous fifty. He always enjoyed *Ojiisan*'s company but

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today, despite the peace of the small garden, Ohara could not control his restlessness. His mind kept probing his puzzling new case.

He must have let his accumulated tension show, for *Ojiisan* drew him finally over to the rock-bordered fishpond. "Isamu"—the old man laid a gentle hand on his arm—"do you see how clear the pool is?"

Ohara looked down at the golden *koi*, flashing like bright jewels beneath the water. "Yes, *Ojiisan*, it's beautiful."

Stooping quickly, the master picked up a handful of pebbles and dropped them one by one into the pool. The glassy surface was convulsed with rippling circles that obscured the watery world beneath. "You see, Isamu, the pool can no longer reflect a true image of what is there. It is like your mind. You, too, are restless and disturbed because you have dropped in too many pebbles. Come inside—we will have tea."

Ohara would have liked to protest that he couldn't stay for tea, but he couldn't find it in his heart to disappoint the old man. "Yes, *Ojiisan*, I should like that very much," he answered, and followed his teacher into the house, pausing only to remove his shoes in the small hallway.

When he was led into the formal *tatami* room, Ohara knew that not only refreshment was intended, but the full treatment—the ritual tea ceremony. It was too late to back out now, so obediently he settled himself Japanese fashion on his knees. As he waited for *Ojiisan* to complete the prescribed preparations of the tea master, Ohara's eyes passed over the exquisite simplicity of the room, which was used only for the *cha no yu* ceremony. The beautiful, simple utensils lay waiting on a small lacquer tray, to be handled with respect and love in the time-honored graceful movements. He admired the chrysanthemums in the *tokonomo* alcove, their flowery heads arranged to honor heaven, man, and earth. His gaze was drawn to the old Japanese print that adorned a side wall. Its glowing colors of blue and amber depicted two sturdy, bulging-calved bearers carrying a lady over a moon-arched bridge.

He had long ago been trained by *Ojiisan* in the proper responses of the tea guest, so he carried off his part in the ceremony adequately. As he turned the brown glazed tea bowl the required three times and suitably admired its rich luster, he wondered briefly what the boys in the department would think of "the Irishman" if they could see him now.

When it was over, Ohara found that the small perfection of time

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had calmed him and cleared his mind. As he put on his shoes and bowed a last *sayonara*, he felt new confidence that he would find the answers he needed.

That evening, still amazingly relaxed, he enjoyed the football game and was proud of young Jim. Peggy had taken his announcement that he would have to work tomorrow quite well. She had by now accepted the realities of being a policeman's wife. After the game, they had indulged in a pizza and beer, and gone home.

Peggy was warm and loving, and as he drifted toward sleep, his arms holding her tightly, he thought drowsily that he had truly emptied his mind. The pool was clear. The therapists, he reflected, should give the Japanese tea ceremony careful consideration. He saw again *Ojiisan*'s calm, measured movements, the quiet peace of the little *tatami* room, the bowing grace of the chrysanthemums, the rich glow of the old print—

Suddenly he was sitting upright in bed.

"That's it! It could be nothing else."

Peggy, halfway between rude awakening and growing concern, touched his shoulder in alarm. "What is it, Sam? What's wrong?"

"Not what's wrong—it's what's exactly right. Never mind, dear, go back to sleep. I'll explain later."

Knowing him well, Peggy snuggled down again. Sam was all right, she knew—the rest didn't matter. But Ohara lay awake, mentally fitting new pieces into the jigsaw puzzle of his case.

The next morning he called into the department and asked his partner, Jake Woszinski, to recheck the residents of the neighborhood where Zalba's body had been found. He wanted to know about anything unusual they might have seen or heard as much as a week before the murder.

After a fortifying breakfast of ham and eggs, he went down to Little Tokyo and visited the largest of the Japanese department stores. The answers he found there seemed to please him. Next he stopped at the office of the Japanese-language newspaper, *Rafu Shimpo*, and talked with the editor.

Here he obtained a back copy of the issue he wanted. He had a quick bowl of noodles in a small cafe, then headed for Pacoima and the scene of Zalba's killing. He knew now how it had been done, but he still didn't know why. Instinct told him that the why of it was most important.

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Deliberately, he turned his mind off, concentrating on his driving. As he turned the corner, a block away from where the body had been found, he suddenly stamped on the brakes and pulled his car to the curb.

He had almost forgotten the convalescent hospital that looked more like a ranch house than an institution. Jake had checked it, he was sure, but the question that had just occurred to him was a brand-new piece of the puzzle.

After the usual protocol, he found himself in the office of the nursing supervisor, a Miss MacPherson, who did not appreciate the intrusion of murder into her well ordered domain.

When he had asked his question, she fairly bristled in defense of her staff. "Our people are carefully screened, Lieutenant O—Ohara." She stumbled momentarily over the name and looked down at his card for reassurance.

"I'm sure they are, Miss MacPherson. I merely want to talk to anyone who came on or went off duty, or left the hospital between eleven and midnight on that night."

"Well, you're out of luck then. Our staff shifts at three-thirty, ten, and six in the morning."

Ohara's heart sank, for the times were wrong. He stood up and his good-looking face relaxed into a smile. "Thank you, anyway, Miss MacPherson. I'm sorry to have taken up your time. But sometimes even negative information can be of help."

Discouraged, he walked down the long corridor to the exit and was just going out the door when he heard his name called, and turned to see Miss MacPherson hurrying after him.

"Oh, Lieutenant Ohara, I just remembered. We have two special nurses who have been coming in for the past three weeks. One of them, Ellen Murakami, comes on at midnight. I wrote down her address." She handed him a slip of paper, with a self-conscious smile brightening her angular features.

Ohara, grateful, sensed what would please her. "*Arigato gozaimashita, Okusan*," he said, then bowed low and went out the door.

Miss MacPherson stood looking after him, her hand touching her cheek, which was pleasantly flushed. "So like James Shigeta in *Flower Drum Song*," she sighed to herself, and walked dreamily back to her office.

Ohara glanced at his watch—almost four o'clock. Ellen Murakami's address was close by, and she would be at home now if she

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went on duty at twelve. He decided to check first with Jake and find out if anything new had turned up. He stopped at a pay phone to make his call.

Jake's jovial response told Ohara that his partner was pleased with the results of his work. "How did you know I'd get a hit?" Jake asked.

"I looked in a fortune cookie. What is it?"

"A Miss Parker, who suffers from insomnia, says she has been hearing clicking sounds around midnight for the past two weeks. She thought it might be kids scraping her picket fence and looked out the window. But there was nothing to call the cops about, just a big fat guy going by in baggy clothes, a cap, and sandals."

Ohara felt a surge of elation. "Thanks, Jake. That's a help."

"Well, you'll need another fortune cookie. She didn't hear it on the night of the murder. That everything?"

"What's her address? I think I'll drop in and see her. I need to kill a few minutes before I talk to another possible witness. Was there anything new on the oil on Zalba's hand?"

"Yeah, the lab says it's a special kind of hair dressing. They haven't run across it before." Then Jake gave him Miss Parker's address and hung up.

Ohara found the woman's house and knocked at the door. The sleepless lady volubly informed him that of course she didn't hear or see anything on the night of the murder because she had gone to her sister's to play bingo, and had stayed overnight.

As soon as he could, Ohara disengaged himself, and a few minutes later he was standing in front of Ellen Murakami's door waiting for someone to answer the bell.

A frail grandmother type opened the door, and after showing his credentials Ohara asked to speak to Miss Ellen Murakami.

"No Engrishu," the old lady muttered, looking scared. She began to shut the door, and he repeated his question in polite Japanese. At this she looked even more frightened, but she opened the door and reluctantly motioned him to come into the living room.

With a hurried bow, she said she would find Murakami-san, and darted out of the room. Ohara heard muttering in the background, but could distinguish no words. One of the voices he was sure had been a man's. Moments later, a girl came through the old-fashioned archway that led into the small living room.

Ohara stood up as she came toward him, studying her pale face, so like a Utamaro painting, under a lustrous sweep of black hair.

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She was dressed simply in a dark skirt and white blouse. The modest V of the neckline was filled in by a peach-colored scarf wrapped closely to her throat.

"I'm Ellen Murakami," she said softly. "You wanted to see me?" Her hands tore nervously at a handkerchief and she seemed scarcely to breathe. Ohara sensed her fear and felt a momentary pity, but his hunter's instincts were alerted. She was very much on guard.

He smiled reassuringly. "Just a few questions. May we sit down?"

He led her through routine questions as to her hours and what she might have seen or heard on the night in question. When she began to relax, Ohara asked suddenly, "What time is it, Miss Murakami? My watch has been running slow today and I do have another appointment."

She looked automatically at her wrist, whitened, and turned her head toward the clock on the mantel. "It is five o'clock, Lieutenant." The fear was back again and it showed in her voice.

At that moment the grandmother came in with two small cups of green tea. The girl smiled, relieved. "My *obachan* thought you would like tea—" She paused, uncertain. Ohara murmured polite thanks as the old lady set down the tea tray and darted away.

"How long ago did you lose your watch, Miss Murakami?" Ohara asked as he picked up the fragrant cup of tea.

"I—I don't know."

"I noticed that you looked first at your wrist, so it must have been fairly recently."

"Perhaps—I can't remember." Suddenly Ohara felt uneasy, sensing another presence, unseen, listening. In the silence, the sibilant sound of breathing was barely audible.

As he drained the tiny teacup, Ohara deliberately let his notebook fall to the floor, along with his pen. Instinctively polite, Ellen Murakami dropped to her knees to retrieve it. Profuse with apologies, Ohara switched to Japanese and she answered him. His eyes never left her face, and as she reached under the chair for the pen he saw what he had expected to see. The peach-colored scarf, pulled slightly askew with the reach of her arm, showed a jagged red line against the ivory skin of her throat.

As Ohara accepted the pen and notebook from her hands with grave thanks, he said, still in Japanese for the benefit of the unseen listener, "I have found your watch, Miss Murakami. It was under the body of the man who was murdered two nights ago not far from the hospital."

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He was stretching a point, he knew, since the smashed fragments in the lab were barely identifiable, but she could not find words to deny it. Her eyes, filled with terror and despair, were all the answer he needed.

He pressed his advantage. "I notice that you have been injured." He indicated her throat. "Did the man attack you? Was that how you lost your watch?"

He hated to bully her, but he knew it was necessary. With a sob, she broke—but her words were unexpected. "Not murder—not murder—"

"Will you tell me about it, Ellen?"

"Iie," she sobbed, shaking her head. The brief Japanese negative seemed her only defense.

Ohara raised his voice and made it threatening, doing what he had to do.

"Then I will have to bring you to the station for questioning, Miss. You are implicated in a murder." The staccato Japanese hammered the words home.

The small cruelty to the girl did the trick. Suddenly the archway was filled with the figure of a man—immense and powerful. His head, with a high formal topknot of hair glistening with oil, barely cleared the curve of the entrance. Ohara caught his breath as his eyes took in the huge bulk of him, straining the dark-blue kimono that covered three hundred pounds or more. The man's hands hung loosely, ready at his sides, and beneath the kimono his bare calves showed like young tree trunks.

Ohara's eyes slid down to the feet and lingered. As he had known they would be, ever since he had remembered *Ojiisan's* Japanese print of the litter bearers, the man's feet were thrust into a pair of Japanese *geta*. Heavy thongs between the toes held the sturdy wooden platforms secure on top of two parallel blocks, which raised them a good two inches from the ground. The same blocks, Ohara knew, which had left the peculiar indentations in the earth beside Zalba's body.

The wooden *geta* clicked on the bare floor as the man moved to stand in front of Ellen.

The inherent menace of the huge figure made Ohara step back into the defensive Aikido stance, his body loose, his mind concentrated to anticipate the expected attack.

But there was no attack. Instead, strangely soft yet guttural Japanese spewed out at him from the man's throat. At the sound, an-

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other piece of evidence fell into place—the man spoke with the bruised vocal chords of a Sumo wrestler.

"*Taisho*, Officer. You will not take her. She has done nothing. It is I who have done this thing."

Before Ohara could answer, Ellen Murakami spoke in rapid English, her hands outstretched in appeal.

"Oh, no, please. It is not what you think. Jiro"—she placed her hand gently on the huge arm of the man beside her—"Jiro was trying to save me. That—that man grabbed me as I passed the driveway and held a knife to my throat." She pulled the scarf aside to show the ugly wound. "He said he was going to—he meant to—but Jiro had followed me." The glance she turned toward her silent protector was rich with love. She continued: "Jiro pushed the man's hands away and told me to run. But I didn't. Then—" She hesitated and the involuntary shift of her eyes told Ohara her next words would not be all truth. "You must believe me. It was an accident. Jiro fell against him. It was an accident—not murder."

Gently, but with a reproachful look, the giant moved Ellen aside. "This is not woman's business. I will speak," he said in Japanese.

Ohara became suddenly formal. He bowed low. "I am glad, Onami-san."

"How do you know my name?"

In answer, Ohara drew from his pocket a folded page from *Rafu Shimpo* with the story of the great Sumo wrestler, Onami, and his visit to California.

The famous wrestler grunted and asked in his soft, slurred voice, "How did you find me? Did someone see?"

Ohara, pocketing the newspaper clipping, shook his head and answered in the Japanese honorific style that befitted the man who stood before him. "No one saw the struggle, Onami-san, but someone noticed you several times the week before passing near the place where it happened."

The big man almost smiled. "I did not wear kimono, but I am too big to hide much. It was very dark. Do Americans not sleep at night?"

Ohara gestured toward Onami's feet. "The sound of your *geta* on the sidewalk woke someone who noticed you. Then, too, beside the dead body I found the marks the *geta* made. When I knew what the marks were, I knew the man I was seeking was Japanese. No *gaijin* walks in *geta* on the street. When I saw how deep the marks were, I knew he must be a very heavy man."

"There are many such heavy men," Onami said impassively.

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Ohara smiled. "True, Onami-san, but the oil on the victim's hand we found to be a kind of hair oil used only in Japan, only by Sumo wrestler." He allowed his eyes to glance at Onami's oiled topknot of hair.

"You are right, *Taisho*," Onami acknowledged, "but how did you come to this house?"

"The hospital told us Miss Murakami arrived about midnight that night. We found the remains of a woman's watch under the body. These two facts pointed here."

Onami moved suddenly and Ohara was on his guard again.

"*Taisho*, I *have* killed this animal, but I did not *intend* to kill him." The wrestler turned to Ellen and gently wiped the tears from her cheek with one huge finger. "Miyuki is my friend's sister. I came from Japan to visit her. I have asked to marry her. I do not like that she goes to work at night, so I follow her. That night I saw the man and what he tried to do. I pulled Miyuki from his hands. Then with his knife he ran against me.

"I am Sumo. I know only one way to fight." The dignity of the simple statement said it all, but Onami continued, "So I charge him and he goes down. When I charge this way in the Sumo ring, no one dies. I am thrown down myself sometimes, yet I am alive."

Ohara could visualize the bulletlike launch of that massive body, the shoulder thrusting into Zalba's scrawny throat until the momentum of Onami's three hundred pounds bore him down, until his skull cracked like an egg on the concrete driveway.

Onami looked down at Ellen reproachfully. "I have told her to run away, but she is not yet obedient. She did not go. She came and touched the man and said he was dead. She warned me we must not say anything or I would be sent away and we could not marry."

Ohara, American as he was, felt his ancestral Samurai blood stir. It was like a tale out of old Japan. It seemed almost impossible that it could have happened on a quiet residential street in California.

He looked at Onami-san, whose name meant Great Wave, waiting quietly for him to pass sentence. He kept his feelings out of his voice and used the polite formal phrases of Japanese officialdom which he knew were expected. "Onami-san, I believe you did not intend to kill this man. Miss Murakami's testimony and the other evidence will show this. There will be some formalities, but you will not be detained longer than necessary." He would not soon forget the look of pure joy on Ellen Murakami's face.

"Tomorrow you must come to the station and make a statement."

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Ohara almost smiled as he thought of the impact Onami would have on the department.

A short time and many bows later, Ohara left the modest house where a modern-day Samurai stood protectively by his promised bride. As he drove away, his mind was undisturbed by the least ripple of doubt. Someday he would tell *Ojiisan* the story. Ohara felt he had a right to know.

"Q"

ON OUR COVER

In his current role as Lieutenant Sam Ohara on ABC's *Ohara* (pronounced O-Ha-Ra), Pat Morita—previously featured in ABC's *Happy Days* and *Mr. T and Tina*—portrays Nan Hamilton's shrewd but compassionate Japanese-American police detective, whose career began in EQMM (see page 102).

Pat Morita was born in Berkeley, California, and spent much of his childhood in the hospital after contracting spinal tuberculosis at the age of two. The illness was so debilitating that he didn't learn to walk until he was eleven. With the onset of World War II, the Morita family was interned in a Japanese-American relocation camp in Tulelake, California. After the war, Mr. Morita worked in the family's Chinese restaurant, then started a career in data-processing, but with no degree and no possibility of further advancement, overweight and pushing thirty, he decided he wanted to be a performer in show business.

He chose comedy, and had to beg for his first job as emcee and house comic at a club in San Francisco. He later performed in some of the most prestigious nightclubs and theaters in the country—Carnegie Hall, the Copacabana, and the Apollo. Besides the Karate Kid movies, his film credits include *Thoroughly Modern Millie, Midway, Slapstick,* and the recently completed *Collision Course,* with Jay Leno. In 1978, he was honored with the Association of Asian/Pacific Artists' Lifetime Achievement Award at the White House, where he met the Prime Minister of Japan. He and his wife Yuki and their daughters, Aly and Tia, make their home in Los Angeles.

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a *NEW* Boley-McKee story by

JOHN F. SUTER

Boley lifted the receiver and was pleased to find that the party line was free. He dialed a familiar number and was even more pleased to find that the sheriff was still at home. "Jim Grant just called," he told him. "Wants me to bury a couple of cows. He says they were shot. I thought you'd be interested."

"Could be. Did he say who or how come?"

"No. He said he'd tell me later."

McKee considered. "Well, no matter. I have a suspicion about it, but we'll see what you find out. I might drop by Grant's later. Give you some time to work first." As an afterthought, he said, "I hope there was nothin' wrong with those cows."

Interesting detection with a latter-day Uncle Abner flavor by one of your favorite contributors, who has a fine eye and ear with exactly this kind of story . . .

NOT ALONE IN HER GRAVE

by JOHN F. SUTER

Arlan Boley's telephone rang a few minutes after seven on a morning in late April.

"Hello? Boley?" a man's sharp voice asked. "Hope I didn't wake you up." His tone implied he was confident that he had not.

"No," Boley answered. He recognized the voice, so he said, "But I don't want this coffee to get cold."

"Oh." The man paused. "This is Jim Grant. You tied up today?"

"Not yet. I am tomorrow, though. What's on your mind?"

"I got a couple of dead cows I need buried. Suppose you could come over here and dig me a hole with whatever machine it takes? Backhoe? You know best."

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Boley ran a hand through his crinkled blond hair and frowned. "What'd they die of?"

"Shot."

Boley's eyes widened. "Both of 'em?"

"Both of 'em."

"Who did it?"

Grant became impatient. "Talk about it when I see you. You comin'?"

Boley swallowed some coffee. "Soon as I finish eatin' and get the backhoe on my stakebed."

"I'll see you then." Grant hung up.

Geneva Boley's brown eyes were concerned. Their two children, Carl and Martha, were curious.

"Trouble?" Geneva asked.

"Not for me." Boley glanced at the children. "Go on, finish your breakfast. School's not been cancelled." He addressed all three. "Listen to my call and you'll know what it's about." He lifted the receiver and was pleased to find that the party line was free. He dialed a familiar number and was even more pleased to find that the sheriff was still at home. "Hello, McKee," he said. "Arlan Boley. You got a minute?"

"Nobody's beat you to it," the sheriff's dry voice answered. "What's on your mind?"

"Jim Grant just called. Wants me to bury a couple of cows. He says they were shot. I thought you'd be interested."

"Could be. Did he say who or how come?"

"No. He said he'd tell me later."

McKee considered. "Well, no matter. I have a suspicion about it, but we'll see what you find out. I might drop by Grant's later. Give you some time to work first." As an afterthought, he said, "I hope there was nothin' wrong with those cows."

Boley finished his breakfast, loaded his equipment, and told his family goodbye. He had long since recognized that it was profitable to provide service with heavy equipment to those in his West Virginia county who couldn't afford to own the machinery themselves. His work hours were uncertain, but he tried to strike a balance between his own needs and the appeals he received.

As he drove west along the ridge where he lived, he passed alternate pasture and wooded areas. The leaves of the trees were just beginning to develop, but there were more than enough white dog-

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wood blossoms and pink blooms from redbuds to relieve the drabness of the woods. In the yards of the cottages, the forsythia were luxuriant in their yellow this year.

Boley kept thinking of the job: bury two cows. Two cows in one grave. Much to his chagrin, a line from an old pseudo-folksong went through his mind. *She's not alone in her grave tonight*— It was absurd to suppose that remembering the song meant trouble again. Lines from folksongs had before, but this was too trivial.

He thought about Grant. Not a rich man, but doing better than many. Most of his income came from Black Angus beef cattle. All of his 130 acres was spread across a broader ridge that intersected this one, and the greater part was in meadow and pasture. Several acres were devoted to tobacco. Close to the white seven-room, two-story house was an extensive garden.

Boley drove four miles farther, turned right on another black-top road, then right again after half a mile. He kept going until Grant's place came up on his left. He entered it on a gravel drive, continuing past the house to the barn, where Grant, no doubt hearing the stake-bed, stood waiting.

The farmer was a big man in his early fifties, dressed in blue-and-white coveralls, a yellow tractor cap, and thick workshoes. His heavy face was grim. Boley pulled up in front of him and cut the motor. "Mornin', Jim. Whereabouts should I park?"

Grant stepped closer and looked up at him with grey eyes under bushy brows. Salt-and-pepper stubble on his long jaw suggested he had yet to shave this day. "Hello, Boley," he said. "Pull over anyplace and unload. It's off that way about a quarter mile." He pointed east along the ridge where grazing land lay. "Just cut in here to the fence and follow along back of the orchard. While you're gettin' ready, I'll get on over and meet you there."

Boley slid from the truck. "Right—" then, as Grant was turning away "—a question came to mind on the way over. How come me? Don't you have a tractor?"

Grant stopped and turned. "I do. But it's got to go to the shop. Somethin's wrong with the power take-off. They're pickin' it up this afternoon."

Boley squinted. "Tough. Just when you're startin' to need it."

Grant turned away again. "It happens."

Boley opened the tailgate of the truck and set his ramp. He fired up the backhoe and ran it off to the ground.

To follow Grant's instructions, he had to avoid a three-quarter-

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ton red pickup standing beside the barn. He idly supposed that either the dew had been heavy or Grant had been washing it. It was noticeably damp, and several occasional drops of water fell from the tailgate to the ground.

After skirting the edge of a modest orchard of apple and pear trees, he came to a wire fence. He followed this east for nearly two hundred yards until he came to Grant. Just past the farmer he could see the carcasses of the two Black Angus cows. He came close, stopped the motor, and climbed to the ground. "That's them, I take it."

Grant turned his head to the left. "That's them."

Boley walked over and looked. The closer cow looked as though she had gone to her knees before collapsing. The other had fallen with legs outstretched—her eyes were still open and bulging.

"Shot, you said," Boley remarked.

"That's right. Both of 'em through the forehead."

Boley looked. A clean hole just above the eyes and in the center in both cases. "What with, do you figure?" he asked.

"Deer rifle."

Boley nodded. "Could be. *You* sound convinced."

The corners of Grant's thin mouth turned down. "That's what he'd use."

Boley made eye contact. The grey of Grant's eyes was that of heavy smoke.

"You know who?" Boley said.

Grant gave a curt nod. "Lon Willis."

The name was no surprise to Boley. Willis owned a small place just to the east of Grant's. He was a widower, without children.

"He still complain at you?" Boley asked.

"Most of the time. It's not my fault he has more'n he can handle." Grant gestured with a big hand. "Come over here."

Boley followed him for several feet along the fence. He needed no prodding to see what Grant had in mind.

The wires of the fence had been pulled loose from two posts and had been bent forcibly until they nearly touched the ground. The dead cows, now on the wrong side, had crossed over here from the pasture, judging by hoofprints in the soft earth.

Boley gave Grant a questioning look. "Willis?"

Grant shook his head. "No. That one." He pointed to the cow with her eyes open. "She was a rogue, no two ways about it. This is what she liked to do best. So she'd coax some of the rest to come along."

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Boley said, "Then they'd go over on Willis?"

"Sometimes. The last time, he threatened to shoot any that did it. Kept his word, seems like."

Boley felt that he should get to work, but his curiosity got the better of him.

"When did this happen?"

A vague look came over Grant's large features. "Last night sometime—I don't know when. I found 'em this mornin'."

Boley stared. "You didn't hear the shots? From a deer rifle?"

Grant seemed uncomfortable. "I was over on Flicker Ridge, fox-huntin'. Probably happened then."

Boley grinned. He saw a vision of Grant and others sitting around a campfire, drinking and listening to their dogs run a fox. In the background, he imagined Geneva's caustic comments to him about the triviality of such a pastime.

Sobering quickly, he asked, "What about Millie? She didn't hear?"

Grant shook his head. "She wasn't at home. She went to see her sister up near Sutton—left yesterday early."

"Has Willis admitted it?"

"Not yet. I was over there, but I couldn't rouse him. He must be hidin' out, can't face me yet."

Boley hated to push the older man, but he had to say it. "You'll take him to court if he doesn't settle with you?"

Grant withdrew within himself slightly. "We'll see. Maybe. I got my own thoughts about Mr. Willis."

Boley's seriousness increased. "You ought at least to report it to Warren McKee."

Grant opened his mouth, but Boley went on: "Look, nobody dragged these cows here. See where the fence is broken down? See where they walked through, where the bodies are? They weren't headin' for Willis's—they were headin' your way."

Grant began to look more thoughtful.

Boley continued. "Willis probably saw it happenin' and hurried on over. Shot 'em before they'd even decided which way to go. When you blamed him, was it because of his threat? Or did you figure this the same as I just did?"

Grant rubbed his chin. "You're ahead of me, I must admit."

Boley slapped a fencepost. "Good. Now, if you get some law over here to back you up, you can nail Willis's hide to the outhouse wall. Make him pay."

Grant pulled himself out of a slouch. "I hate to disappoint you,

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Boley, but I don't want to do that. I don't want to fritter away my time in court. I got too much to do."

Boley was taken aback. "But you'll be losin' money."

Grant nodded. "Yeah."

"Then, why—"

"The fence was broken down more'n once, remember?"

"Yeah."

Grant looked away. "How would I look in court? A cow outsmarted me? Not once but several times? A cow smarter than me? A *cow!*"

Boley sighed. "It's your decision."

He looked down. On the ground was a heavy-duty staple gun, capable of bonding light wood or heavy fabric to heavier wood. A short flat piece of steel was near it. He picked up the gun. "Is this how you fasten wire to your locust posts? Straddle the wire with one or more of these staples?"

Grant nodded. "Partly. I use regular staples and hammer 'em tight, then I reinforce 'em with that."

Boley put the gun down. "All right. That was a strong, smart cow. So where do you want me to dig?"

"Just about where they are."

Boley looked about. "Doesn't look to be near your well. Safe enough. What about Willis's?"

"Around the other side of his house. A good distance."

"Okay, then." Boley turned back to his machine, then stopped. "Tell me something, Jim. Was there anything wrong with those two cows?"

"Isn't shootin' enough—" Grant began. He stopped and his face went white. "You think it's faked? You think I might be coverin' up? Coverin' up anthrax or another serious problem?"

Boley eyed him steadily. "Just askin' a question we hadn't brought up."

Grant began to quiver. "Do you realize I'd never have called you if that was the case? I'd just have loaded 'em into my pickup—never mind how I'd heft two cows in there, but I'da done it—then I'da taken 'em over to the Stink Hole and dumped 'em down it. Nobody'd ever been the wiser."

Boley knew about the Stink Hole. It was in a ravine a few miles east off this ridge. Not exactly a sink hole, it was a deep pit created by a quirk in the rock strata. Uncaring inhabitants of the county occasionally disposed of dead animal carcasses and other refuse by

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dumping into it. He held up a hand, palm out. "I'm sorry, Jim. I should have known. I apologize."

"And that answers one of *my* questions," said a voice behind them.

Grant and Boley looked around. A few feet away stood Sheriff Warren McKee, a spare man whose tan never seemed to fade from one year to the next.

Grant frowned. "What brings you here, McKee?"

McKee smiled faintly. "Rumors. Satisfy my curiosity. What's goin' on?"

Boley kept silent while Grant went through a synopsis of the situation, finishing with: "Boley's also helped me see how I could make Willis look bad in court if I wanted to."

The sheriff shot a glance at Boley. "Did he? I'm glad to see he respects law and order. Not like Willis. Not like you, maybe, if I'm listenin' right. Did you say you'd report this? No." He stared at Willis's cottage about six hundred feet to the east. "I think I'd better go over and see Willis," he said.

"I don't think you'll find him," Grant commented sharply. "I'll bet he's off hidin' somewhere."

"Maybe," said McKee, walking away. "Even so, I might learn somethin'. Don't go away." He called back, "And don't bury those cows yet!"

He was gone half an hour. Boley and Grant discussed fox-hunting, the chances of a good hay yield, and other small topics.

"You were right," McKee said as he approached. "Nobody there. What's his car look like?"

Grant looked at a rifle McKee was now carrying with a handkerchief wrapped around his hand, but he said nothing about it. "A two-door '81 Chevy. Light blue. Faded some."

McKee stood the rifle against the fence and noted the information on a memo pad. "I think we want to locate that gentleman," he said. "I heard he was gettin' harder to deal with since his wife died. Would you say so?"

"I'd agree with that, yes," Grant said.

"Place looks kept up pretty well," McKee went on. "Just like a woman planned it, inside and out. Maybe he's tryin' to keep her memory alive. Maybe that's why he threw a gut-fit when your cows came trompin' through."

"I'd not be surprised," Grant agreed.

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The sheriff gave him a level glance. "You have pretty strong ideas, too, don't you?"

"If you mean that I believe in givin' it everythin' I've got and tryin' to do the best I can, yes," Grant said. "Of course, Millie's been a big help. Always done what I expect out of her. That good garden we got—she's followed every one of my instructions, and it's paid off."

"Well, you do mighty well, even when you relax," McKee said. "You raise fine beef cattle. With that and that showplace garden you mention, you and Millie live pretty well. Everybody likes Millie and envies you for havin' her." He paused. "As for relaxin', you win trophies about every year with those fox-huntin' dogs of yours."

"Good of you to say all this," Grant murmured.

"Nothin' but facts," McKee answered. "Let's leave Boley's machine here and all of us take a little walk." He picked up the rifle, again with the handkerchief wrapped around his hand.

Boley glanced at the gun. "Willis's?"

"I guess so. Came from his house."

They walked in silence until they came to the gate to the grazing land. McKee stopped and leaned on it, looking across the fields. "I see some car tracks," he said to Grant. "Yours?"

"My pickup."

McKee turned around. "Your pickup. Oh, yes. I saw it when I came in. Over by the barn. Let's look at it."

As they walked to the truck, Boley noticed that McKee had parked his car blocking the lane.

They stopped beside the truck. McKee looked at it, then at Grant. "Still damp," he said, "but not as wet as it was when I came in. Why was it so wet, Grant? —And don't tell me dew. My car was out all night, and it wasn't all that wet a lot earlier than this."

"I gathered up a lot of manure late yesterday and brought it in for the pile. Washed the truck off just before Boley came."

McKee looked closely. "Most farmers keep a cart they tow around for things like that. Hitch it behind a tractor."

Grant waved a hand. "My tractor's broke down. That's why I called Boley over to bury my cows."

Boley nodded. "No, you wouldn't want to waste time gettin' 'em into the ground, would you?"

McKee turned away. "Excuse me a minute. Got to put the gun away."

After putting the rifle into his car, he came back.

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He stared at Grant.

"So you washed away the manure smell, did you? Sure you didn't drive over to the Stink Hole sometime last night?"

Grant lifted his head and inhaled audibly. "What do you mean by that? What for?"

McKee stepped to the back of the truck and opened the tailgate. When he did, a small recess showed on each side where the hinges went into the body. From the right-hand one he extracted a small piece of what looked like sausage casing. "My curiosity'll be the death of me someday. My wife used to tell me that when she was alive. I saw your wet truck when I came in and I never thought about manure. I took a look and I came across this. Doesn't look like manure." He held up his find.

Nobody spoke.

"Let's go back to the cows," McKee said.

As they walked, he said, "You know, gossip can be useful, even if you have to be careful about believin' it. I heard about Lon Willis from time to time. What it mostly seemed to add up to was that he was lonely. Would you say he was neighborly, Grant?"

"Sort of. Until his wife died," Grant said indifferently.

"I wonder if he dropped over when you were fox-huntin'," McKee speculated.

"I can't answer that," the farmer grumped. "Millie never said."

They stopped beside the dead cows.

"Those cows were shot, that's for sure," said McKee. "But they weren't shot with Willis's gun, I'd bet on *that*. It didn't have any shells in it, and it hadn't been fired. I think it might even have a little dust on it. Could be my eyes, though."

He studied the sky a few seconds, then: "Here's what I think," he said. "Boley, you were sharp about what you suggested to Grant. I think Millie didn't go to her sister's yesterday. I have a feelin' that when the fox-hunt was goin' on, she and Willis were bein' *real* neighborly. Then one of the fox-hunters came home earlier than either of them expected. Old situation.

"All of a sudden, there are two less people out here. Then the third one, the one that was left, got real busy. When he pulled in from the hunt, he probably saw in his headlights that that rogue cow was up to her old tricks. So he came back out of the house, takin' his own rifle that he'd just used. He worked on that fence himself, finishin' what the rogue cow had started, shooed those two cows out, and shot them both.

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"What next? He drove his truck up, laid a tarp by each cow in turn, slit 'em up the middle, and dressed 'em out, You might say. Put the lights, liver, and everything else in the pickup, then drove the load of guts to the Stink Hole and dumped it. Came back, and washed up early this morning. Only—" he said, holding up the thing that resembled sausage casing "—he missed this piece of gut."

"You're gettin' pretty wild, McKee," Grant muttered. "What all this is supposed to mean, I don't know."

"I probably have the order of everything mixed up," McKee said. "Maybe the trip to the Stink Hole came last. Anyway, at some time or other the two bodies were brought out of the house and crammed into the cow carcasses."

"I'd have seen cuts that big," Boley objected.

"Yes, but—" McKee went to the post and picked up the stapler and the piece of steel "—the cuts were closed with this."

"The staples would back out without something to anchor them," Boley said.

"This hunk of steel would crimp the ends if you held it tight on the other side of the cut," McKee pointed out. "If we look, I think we'll see it."

Boley had thought he wouldn't shudder again after the blowing up of the jail months earlier. He was wrong.

Grant started to speak, but thought better of it.

"What were you goin' to say?" McKee asked. "Where's Willis's car? I don't know, but I'd guess you ran it way down the other side of the ridge where your grazin' land turns into timber, then you walked back. There're tracks there. We'll find out."

He reached to his holster and drew his revolver. He handed it to Boley.

"Keep this on him, and don't hesitate to use it. I got me a job to do."

He reached into his coat and drew out a sheathed hunting knife. "Found it on the seat of the pickup." As he stooped over the first cow, he said, "We're a lot alike, Boley. We both do things that other people can't or won't do."

He ran his hand over the cow's stomach. "Here're the staples, the way I said they'd be."

He began an incision. As he did, Boley, still watching Grant, let part of his gaze turn to the orchard.

The trees were in full blossom, an ecstasy for the eye, a rapture for the spirit. His emotions leaned on the sight with gratitude.

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a *NEW* short story by

THOMAS ADCOCK

Detective Sergeant Harold Tipton told the I.A.D. interviewer, "I don't want to be saying it was some kind of heaven on earth for the average black family in Detroit back then, which it definitely was not. Worst thing we had was the cold eyes all the time. You probably heard of cold eyes, mister man, but you can't know what they do to you if you never felt them looking at you."

Big news for Thomas Adcock fans, aside from this new story, is the fact that his first novel about undercover cop Neil Hockaday, Sea of Green, *will soon be published by The Mysterious Press . . .*

SHOOT ME, I'M ALREADY DEAD

by THOMAS ADCOCK

Tape #1 [Voice of Det. Sgt. Harold G. Tipton, posted to Central Homicide Squad, Beaubien Street Station; suspension ordered 10/24 pending I.A.D. investigation/officer's weapon discharged.] Wednesday, 26th October:

I drink the whole Saturday night straight through to dawn. What can I tell you? I'm thinking nobody's going to ever find out what I did. Yeah, I know—stupid.

But anyhow, it's maybe thirty–forty minutes into the first daylight of last Sunday morning and there I am heading off to Darshaw's place, thinking stupid like I say. Darshaw's got to be asleep, I figure, so I can get the drop on him good—he'll get what anybody in this city would be happy to tell you he richly deserves.

I'm driving an unmarked unit that night. I park it two blocks from Darshaw's place, some corner of Peterboro Street. Then I walk

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through alleys to the back of Darshaw's, which I open with my set of picks.

I don't remember too much about walking into the house or passing through any rooms on my way to him. I only remember coming on him suddenlike in the dark, then I've got my mitts wrapped around his skinny neck and I'm squeezing for all I'm worth—only I can't squeeze hard as I'd really like to on account of my damn arthritis.

Nobody knows how much I hate this kid, his kind of teenage hoodlum. I don't even know yet myself how I hate Darshaw and all the other "new jacks," what they call themselves. Yeah, new jacks. Our very latest breed of Detroit gangster, all of them nothing but kids. You seen them, right? You know what I'm talking about.

I only start realizing the depth of my hatred while I'm choking out this filthy punk, choking him wide awake on the Lord's own day. Darshaw, he's putting up a pitiful fight. He's still groggy, but he knows what's going down. He's looking me right in the face with those dulled eyes like all the kids have nowadays, like he's looking at nothing more compelling than maybe the hundred-thousandth TV murder he's seen in his nineteen years. And this just makes me crazier, that way he's staring at me. I'm thinking about the .38 I'm packing in my shoulder holster and how nobody's going to be the wiser.

I keep on choking him. Only he isn't dying. He's just staring at me and squirming around, and I'm hating him for his dead eyes—and for the big ugly Rolex on his wrist and the Gucci running suit he's using for pajamas. I'm hating him for all the times he's called me a "black-in-blue" —like I'm nothing but an old Tom for wanting to be a cop all my life. I'm hating him because he's my nephew, man, because he's blood.

I hate him because he says "heh-ron" for heroin and "axe" for ask, and because he smells of cologne that's too expensive for me to buy for myself. I hate him for the Mitsubishi Montero jeep with the black-tint bulletproof windows he's got locked up in the garage out back. I hate him because of the goosedown leather jacket with the mink-trimmed hood lying on the floor next to the bed and that black-leather cap of his with the white brim. That cap! I know it's crazy, stupid—but that cap!

I got the right to hate him for what he did to this other new jack—the way he put a .357 Magnum up alongside the kid's jaw and said to him, "Yo-Yo, you're too pretty, chump," and then fired. I got

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the right to hate him because he's one of these kids we got now who don't hold values, kids who don't own a conscience. The kids who make this city a nightmare. I got the right to hate him because he's a new-jack dope prince with his own crew, and he's only nineteen. I hate him because he comes off the same streets I do and when I look at him, God help me, I see a picture of myself when I was nineteen.

What? So, all right, it's last Sunday morning, first light, and I'm leaning over the bed trying to squeeze the life out of the kid, when I see that black cap on the floor. And I let go of his neck. And draw my piece.

> Tape #2 [Det. Sgt. Harold G. Tipton entered voluntary psychiatric observation program, Henry Ford Hospital, 10/27. This date, Sgt. Tipton waives rights to presence of departmental legal counsel during this and/or all subsequent I.A.D. interrogation(s).] Tuesday, 15th November:

You say you want the whole story? Haw, you'd be the very first white man I ever knew wanted the *whole* story any black man had to tell. Nothing personal, buddy—I don't mind. Go ahead and run your tape machine—we'll see what damn good it does either one of us.

Would I be right in figuring you got me written up in your report so far as a buggy cop?

No need to answer. Why shouldn't you think I'm off my nut? Here I am in the puzzle house, after all. I'm all dressed up in a sheet that's slit clear up my backside, everything they give me to eat has got to be eaten with a spoon, they give me pills supposed to zone me out for my own good, so I'm told, and there are all kinds of big guys in white coats loitering around watching me so I don't go picking up anything sharp.

Then, of course, there's the little matter of what it was I did.

But let me just say something first, something that I come to realize only after all these days and nights of being shut up in a place full of white walls and steel beds with straps on them. What happened to me goes back to years and years before that Sunday morning. You want the whole story, not some simple-mind jive the doctors and lawyers and newspapers can follow, I'm meaning to tell you a story with more than two little sides to it.

You and me, we're cops, we're your average Detroit survivors. Ever notice that's what most cops in this town are, white or black?

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We all come up as kids in the toughest town there is, and we had plenty of troubles, right? Maybe you're like me and there's one or two things you did in your time you shouldn't want most people to know about. But we become cops, of all things. That's a real kick in the head when you stop and think about it.

You go through academy and it's unreal. On graduation day, the mayor shakes your hand and somebody gets you all lined up pretty for your individual portrait and then the group portrait. Then you buckle on your department-issue .38 special for the first time and you realize it's part of you until death do you part.

Then it gets real, fast. You're out on the street on your own and you hear stuff you never heard before, never even imagined. And you see people you never much paid attention to before, you see stuff that makes you sick in your craw. You keep on going like you're supposed to, like a good soldier, but you can't help hating what you have to deal with most of the time. You go out on a call and see some guy who made a bloody pulp out of his wife, or maybe a little baby with cigarette burns in his skin because his mama couldn't stand the crying no more. You know what I'm telling you, you've seen it. You've seen the little boys with the big guns killing other little boys over nothing but what slum corner is supposed to belong to who. And little girls all dirty-mouthed and smoking and drinking and ignorant, with nothing they can see to expect but a welfare check when they get pregnant. And the dope and the pimps everywhere, east side and west. That's your American apple-pie misery, hear? Most natural thing in the world to hate it, am I right? You know I am. You're nothing but the same as me. And begging your pardon, but you would have done the same as me.

Nothing personal, pal, but I see it plain in you. You're a regulation hater. When it comes to cop hate, I know you like I know my ownself. Man, I even know what it was that come over you the day you got the same as me.

Strange day, wasn't it? You're out there, and then, for what seems like no particular reason, you start thinking back to graduation at the academy and the way you felt then, like you couldn't wait to hit the street and save everybody from the bad guys, and you realize how somewhere along the line you started hating the bad guys. And now comes this very strange understanding out of the blue about how everybody's got the right to hate a lousy situation in life and suddenly you're feeling some bad guy's hate inside of you, like you just swallowed him up.

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Yeah, buddy, it's the old and vicious cop circle closing in on you, and if you're not careful or smart or lucky it can put you where I am now.

> Tape #3 [Det. Sgt. Harold G. Tipton, subject interviewee, requests I.A.D. interviewer 11/15 to leave premises of Henry Ford Hospital psychiatric ward until this subsequent date. Sgt. Tipton requests I.A.D. interviewer to "sleep on it," meaning interrogations thus far.] Wednesday, 16th November:

You come back for more, hey? What the hell you going to do with the record you got on this so far? Aw, forget it, that's not going to matter to me. I've been thinking about what I'd tell you if you did come back, which I figured was maybe fifty-fifty. So maybe you really do want to hear the whole story like you say.

Okay then, I'm going to take you back a ways, back to July of nineteen sixty-seven. Which is what everybody calls The Riot—which if we want to be strictly honest about it we should call our celebration of hate.

It was the riot that made me a cop and it was the riot that made my brother Howard—Darshaw's father—go exactly the other way. It was the riot that delivered us the fear that's never left this town since. The riot changed everything the average Detroit guy ever knew about his city. I for one sure as hell don't remember any young homeboys the likes of Darshaw before the riot. What I do remember is my old man telling Howard and me all the time, until we used to start laughing and rolling our eyes, "Boys, this city is right now the very best place in the whole U.S. of A. for black folks."

You remember twenty years back? The automobile plants were running fullsteam then and wages were good. Guys complained of having to work too much overtime. Imagine that today—there was no such thing as a Yugo or a Mazda or a Hyundai. Motown still had studios up alongside the Davison Expressway. Gasoline was thirty cents a gallon, unless there was a gas war going, in which case my old man would drive to this certain filling station he knew out on Michigan Avenue where he'd top his tank for eighteen-nine.

That kind of stuff, it's nice to remember, but I don't want to be saying it was some kind of heaven on earth for the average black family in Detroit back then, which it definitely was not. Worst thing we had was the cold eyes all the time. You probably heard of cold eyes, mister man, but you can't know what they do to you if you never felt them looking at you.

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The best thing we had going back then, the most important thing, was what you'd call balance. People learning how to get on with each other, different as they might be, just by coming together at certain places. I remember black folks coming together from what seemed like two different worlds. There was the "E-lites," what we called them, and they were your bright-faced middle-class folks who wore the madras shirts and Levis and Weejuns. They all lived on the west side. Then there was the "Hootie-Hoos" on the east side. They wore Damon knit shirts and sharkskin slacks and alligator slip-on shoes. The balance was Twelfth Street, what we called the Main Vein, which is right where Howard and me lived.

Daddy owned a little delicatessen on Twelfth, one of the very first black men to own a shop on the Main Vein. We lived in a big apartment upstairs over the store. Before the world blew up on us, Daddy was thinking about buying a house somewhere west of Oakman Boulevard, maybe all the way over near Rosedale Park. That was Daddy's little dream, that's about all.

Then came the twenty-third of July.

It was terrible weather we'd been having in Detroit. For something like ten days straight it was over ninety degrees and there was no relief in the forecast. Around three or four in the morning, down a couple of doors from us at a blind pig, there was suddenly big trouble. Every cop in town knew about this joint for years—just a little old place that didn't bother about a liquor license and served after-hours besides. But this one hellish hot night, the cops decided to come on like they're Eliot Ness.

My brother Howard and me, we hear all the commotion and excitement down in the street and we go to the open window of our bedroom. Daddy and Ma, they've got their heads stuck out the other window. And I see everybody else we know hanging out their windows, too—everybody on Twelfth Street is wide awake, watching things get noisier and uglier. Two or three dozen cops, all of them white, are hauling off about a hundred black guys and black women, poking at them with nightsticks and shoving them into paddy wagons. Bottles and bricks start flying out of windows and then pretty soon one of the squad cars catches fire because somebody knows how to make a Molotov cocktail. And then, before anybody can believe it, the city is burning.

I forget a lot of what happened that night and over the next days of the riot. Some of it I try as hard as I can to forget. But I'll never forget what happened to Daddy right in front of Howard and me.

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Daddy is shouting something from the window. *All* the men—outside and at their windows—are shouting. And then Daddy runs downstairs with no shoes on. I can hear his feet slapping on the wooden stairs outside our bedroom. Howard and me, we're scared as hell. And Ma is screaming and hollering like she knows what's going to happen but there's nothing she can do to stop it.

I hear a shot, first one I ever heard in my life. Then another one, and another. Howard and me run down the stairs, leaving Ma screaming at the window. We get to the front door and see Daddy stumbling and reeling, in just a pair of old pants and no shirt, holding himself in front. Then he falls, chest to the concrete sidewalk, and he's bleeding so bad.

This cop comes over to Daddy and kicks him until he flips over. And I see the question on Daddy's face—why?

The cop, a big guy with a red face and curly red hair and cold eyes, looks down at my daddy and he kicks Daddy's head. He's holding a little gun in his hand, much smaller than the one still holstered on his belt. His hand is down close against his leg and he opens his hand and lets the gun drop. That gun hitting the ground is the loudest thing I'm going to hear of the whole evil riot.

What happened in the next few minutes is stuff I've been trying for better than twenty years to forget about—which up to now I've managed to do because everybody's always claiming what's past is past. Which is a filthy lie. The past never ever quite passes, does it?

Anyhow, four days after my father's shot down on Twelfth Street, he dies right here in Henry Ford Hospital. Two years after that, Ma goes, too, because her heart can no longer carry on with what's happened to our family. Maybe she knew what was going to happen to the city, too, and that she couldn't do nothing about that any more than she could about Daddy getting it.

What happened to the red-faced cop? For now I'll just tell you the hump never should have turned his back.

> Tape #4 [Voice of Darshaw Tipton, patient in orthopedic unit, Mount Carmel Hospital, age 19. Present for interrogation is Basil Campbell, counsel for Darshaw Tipton. Tipton on police hold for questioning in aggravated assault case file D.P.D. 378504567.] Thursday, 17th November:

My Uncle Harold, man, he crazy. You seen that your own self. He crazy, and every street beast, he know Harold got money for them any time a word about me come across where he got the chance to

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nail me down. Harold, he be on my case every day a sun rise, man, every day.

He think he better blood than me. But Harold, he nothing but a pile of nothing, man! It kill him he know I know that. It kill him he know it's the true fact of his life.

So why he after me all the time like that? Why he come did this what he done?

First time I remember I be nailed, I twelve year old, man. I run with the YBI then—Young Boys Incorporated. We selling the best heh-ron in Detroit by our own brands—Rolls-Royce, CBS, Coochi-Khan, whatever your pleasure to paradise. We be first to sell crack anyplace I ever know about, too. And fifty-ones, where we mix crack and reefer in a joint.

The Young Boys, they mind me good. My daddy, he ain't even a memory around Brewster project no more. Ma, she just a B-girl whore. So YBI, man, they care for me 'cause I'm a smart nigger juvenile. Young Boys, they like a J-beast like me to do the deed.

So I do it. I'm a steerer, you know? But they give me my own nine to carry in my belt, and that feel good, and I got all kind of gold and so much money I can't count it all up. Oh, yeah, I got the gusto.

Some day we get nailed. This was on account of we pulled some white guys out of their Benz in front of Hart Plaza and we take them over to the crew-leader house on Prairie Street, because these are very bad ofays, see? We got to teach them a lesson about any ofays going messing into the business where the YBI belong exclusive.

So we take a hammer and spikes and we nail their white feet to the floor, man. Hoo-wee, there's blood everyplace. They're learning. Only trouble is, them ofays be screaming like pigs so loud somebody call up the man and the cherry-tops and paddy wagons are there and the party's over.

Harold, somehow he find out about me being along on this, so he come by Juvenile Hall to sweat me some. I ain't ratting nobody out, I say. Harold, he got this sorrowful look on him and he say to me, "We can overcome, son—there is a better way." I look Uncle Harold right in the eyeballs and I say, "How come we all s'pposed to overcome but nobody told me? There *ain't* no better life. I be a twelve-year-old nigger making so much gusto it's goofy. I get me a Uzi next year. How much you getting paid, you black-in-blue chump?"

That's when Harold got crazy the first time. He whup me in the head with his fists until blood come into my ears. And Harold, he

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be crying, and the more he cry the more he whup me. I want him to stop it, man. So I did it to him. I told him what my daddy told me was a secret to tell if I ever needed to.

He tell me it's filthy lies what I say. But it ain't lies—I know it, he know it. *Uncle Harold* lie. He say, "I live by the law, boy!"

And I say, "Outlaw is the law."

> Tape #5 [Voice of Det. Sgt. Harold G. Tipton. Subject interviewee apprised of interrogation 11/17 of nephew, Darshaw Tipton. Subject interviewee greatly disturbed, and seemingly relieved of emotional burden.] Friday, 18th November:

The boy seems good? He's a good-looking kid, isn't he? He's going to be a handsome man—once I thought a big, strapping man. A man I never was, like his own daddy Howard never was. Well, never mind that now. You keep wanting to know more about Toole, the red-faced cop that shot down my old man, right?

I carry a throw-away gun myself now. Or did. Anyhow, Toole, the cop back in 'sixty-seven, he drops his and starts backing off before he realizes the man he just shot and kicked in the head has two sons there to see it all. Howard, he's already big and tall and I'm ranging up there myself, but this dumb Toole, he's not thinking fast enough, if he's thinking at all. He turns his back and walks off like it's no big deal what he just did. Which is just about the best guarantee I can imagine that a man is going to wind up getting shot with his own piece—which is what happened. Even though he was maybe twenty feet away and there was all the other noise and fire sirens, I remember hearing his spine crack.

Some cops came by after they got all the people carted off in the paddy wagon and the bricks and bottles let up some, and Howard and me, we were standing there side by side and now the little gun was thrown down again and this white cop said to me, "Who done it, nigger?"

I looked down at my feet, bare as Daddy's, and I said, "My brother, he did it."

They started in on Howard, clubbing him until his eyes shut, and then they hauled him off in a squad car. I never saw him again until eight days later, after the riot was over and the politicians started giving us statistics instead of understanding. Some cops brought him home. They were plainclothes and they were driving their own car. This one cop who was in charge told Ma how he was sorry for her troubles and how they were going to square things by kicking

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the rap against Howard—not that they weren't going to keep a damn close eye on him. That was about the gist of it.

Hell, the thing was, they didn't dare nail him. If they took Howard to trial, they'd somehow have to explain away Toole's toss-down piece, which would introduce the little matter of how maybe our father wasn't just some tragic nigger caught in the crossfire of the riot. There was a lot like that slipped through the cracks when it was all over.

Ma was smart enough to keep her mask on tight around the white boys while they lied to her like they did. And smart enough to play the dusky for them, too. "Mighty grateful to you gennulmens for your most special kindness and considerations. My Howard, I'll watch the boy close—he ain't gonna be no trouble to no one of y'all nohow."

Toole's buddies left, and Ma went upstairs to the kitchen and baked and cooked for a couple of days, she was so upset. Howard and me were left alone together in the deli downstairs, and we stood looking at each other, neither one of us knowing what to say. And then Howard grabbed my shoulders and pulled me against him and I felt his heart rattling inside him. And he said, "Forget it, little brother. What's past is past."

Nothing happened right to Howard since then. The cops, they couldn't nail him, but they could make it so he couldn't move around anywhere, straight or otherwise. He'd get a job someplace, it would only last until the boss would call him in because somebody put something in his ear about what he did on a July night in 'sixty-seven and how Toole had left a wife and three little red-headed daughters. And when Howard had to listen to this, he wasn't so good at putting on the mask as Ma was. He got mad and loud and ugly and that's what the boss remembered, forget about how Toole shot down Daddy. Nobody wanted to hear about somebody's daddy shot by a dead cop with three little red-headed daughters left by themselves.

And pretty soon, of course, Howard just gave up on the straight and narrow. He met up with a young lady over on the east side who introduced him to a whole lot of trouble he couldn't handle any better than he did his old bosses. He wound up spending most of his time locked up in the trap on a stretch, or waiting for trial on some pissant collar. Oh, he had time enough with that young lady, though. That's where Darshaw got into the picture.

Me, I did the usual damn fool things and caught my share of clouts

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with a nightstick, but mostly I stayed clean enough. And then one day I read in the paper about how the police department was making some big effort to recruit us blacks as officers. So that's my career story. I thought maybe I could do something noble, I don't know.

But there isn't any nobility to be had in being a cop here. Once maybe there was, maybe there's still little traces of it at the P.A.L. gyms, but the city went and lost its balance, like I said.

Drugs hit this city hard and first in the country, and there's probably no return now. Look out Woodward Avenue now on a summer night, or Jefferson Boulevard or Gratiot or Lilvernois, and who do you see? New-jack crews riding four abreast in those four-wheel-drive custom Wrangler jeeps that get the drugs delivered in snow or rain or whatever and outrun any damn Plymouth squad car by just turning into off-rock brush or vacant lots. You know what I'm saying.

Inside, the new jacks are all packing their nines, their nine-millimeter automatics, and you better count on them having Uzis, too. And most powerful of all, they just don't care. Like dogs is what they are. Dogs don't know they're going to die, don't have the concept, so they can be fierce. And like dogs, there's packs of them. New jacks circle this town hooked up by cellular phones. You been to 'Nam? These new-jack crews, they're like platoons on maneuvers in Elephant Valley, only instead of olive-drab they're wearing Gucci and Bill Blass runner suits, Bally and Diadora gym shoes, and some of them even have these Kruggerrands on gold cables hanging around their necks.

This is the gang element we're dealing with now. We're dealing with these kids who are suffering a disease, man. It's a disease that's so new and powerful and contagious there isn't any name yet.

> Tape #6 [Voice of Basil Campbell, counsel to Darshaw Tipton. Meeting held in Campbell's law offices in Penobscot Building. Campbell apprised of disposition of case file D.P.D. 378504567, releasing client Darshaw Tipton from any further suspicion and/or questioning on aggravated-assault matter.] Monday, 21st November:

I'd like to thank you first for expediting the release of my client. That's for the record. Off the record, I'll tell you Darshaw's guilty of a lot, but it so happens here that he never did the shoot where his rival had his face blown off. That was a whole different crew altogether, and anybody who knows about the streets nowadays would know that Darshaw's crew got along with that other guy's

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crew perfectly well. The two crews, in fact, were what they call "married."

Of course, you get some hot-head cop like Darshaw's uncle, who thinks he knows something and it's just no trick at all to get him to do your dirty deed, you follow? The way it looks from here is that Sergeant Tipton was duped by one of his snitches taking money from both ends. One of Darshaw's bona fide rivals wants Darshaw to step off and decides he's going to be smart about it—he finds out about Darshaw a little bit, personal, so he can see if there's a way he can get to him through some back door. Which is where Uncle Harold comes in, literally.

Uncle Harold gets the whisper he's been dying to hear, he drinks all night and gets crazier even than usual, and he does what he does. It's well known the guy has it in for the kid and he's looking for an excuse. The snitch just lit the fuse.

And my client winds up the way he does. Well, you've been spending a lot of time on this matter, more than you have to. I mean, you must have known from the first minute you talked to Sergeant Tipton that he's all done as a cop, that it's just a question of whether the P.D. is going to stand by him with at least a pro forma defense. Isn't that right? Well, if you ask me, I think Uncle Harold deserves a good defense. If my trade wasn't where it is, I'd do it for him.

Look, let's square with each other. I know what you think about a guy like me. Rich lawyer in a nice big office that made it big these last five or six years on cash business off these new-jack punks. But I wonder why nobody ever has the same contempt for all the funeral houses in this town doing land-office business. Some new jack gets offed and, sure, he's entitled to a splashy funeral. How about when he's nailed—isn't he entitled to a good defense?

I can see this doesn't interest you. Skip it. However, I don't want you leaving here thinking I like every minute of my job, because I don't.

> Tape #7 [Voice of Det. Sgt. Harold G. Tipton. Subject interviewee checked out of Henry Ford Hospital 11/22. Interrogated at his apartment on West Hancock.] Wednesday, 23rd November:

Tomorrow's Thanksgiving, mister man. I suppose that means you'll be in the warm bosom of your family getting shit-faced in front of the TV, watching the games. Happy holiday, pal. I really mean it.

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Today you come back for the end of the story, right? You figure you know enough to see how it isn't over yet. You'd be wondering how Darshaw got it in the kneecaps like he did. And maybe you'd be wondering even more than that. Maybe you figured it for yourself, maybe you got it out of Darshaw, I don't know. One thing, though—there's more than you may think—

I got my .38 in my hand, the one they give me at graduation day from the academy—oh, man, that gun that meant I was supposed to be a good guy. I'm crazy and drunk, and there's nothing I can do to change the fact of that, and he's staring at me with those damn dead eyes, not even hating me for what I'm about to do to him—which is to drill him, man, no way can he think otherwise.

He gives up the struggle.

I look down at the floor and there's that cap of his.

I look back and see my nephew's face—and in it I see *my* face and my brother's face. And I'm remembering the time when Howard come back from the week of being beat up day and night by Toole's buddies. And my hands, they stiffen up more than usual from the arthritis.

Darshaw notices and he says to me, quietlike and cool as you please, "I know what you done to my daddy."

I don't say anything back. He says, "I know what you done because my daddy told me, long time ago."

I stand up.

"*You* was the one picked up the gun and gave the honky cop the business, man! Then when the man come 'round asking what nigger done it, you finger your own damn brother. My daddy, he let it go 'cause he a bigger man than you, chump, wherever he is now."

I can't look at Darshaw because he's setting me on fire with the truth about myself.

"You nothin'—you a no-account nothin' nigger, chump! You kill a pig who done your own daddy in front of you, and all these years you ain't man enough to claim the credit for doing right and then take what your black ass has got coming for that. So then you go join up with the pigs, man! You go right over to the other side, you big black-in-blue pile of nothing!"

I hear everything Darshaw is telling me, but it sounds as if he's far away someplace. What's got my fullest attention right then is that cap of his on the floor. There's a white brim on it and this black lettering that reads, SHOOT ME, I'M ALREADY DEAD. Your new-jack sense of humor.

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And I think to myself right then and there how this is just a damn nineteen-year-old kid, no matter what he's done. And a long time ago—he was younger than twelve the first time he talked to me that way—he knew all about what happened. He's known all the time since he was a child. It made him a cynic. There's nothing more horrible than a cynical child. He's not old enough to know anything and he'll never know hope.

So he might as well be dead. Like his cap says.

I take aim on his heart, but maybe I'm not man enough. Or maybe I am. I don't know. I kneecap him instead and now he's as through being a new jack as I am being a cop. Both of us should get what we've got coming.

DETECTIVERSE

A SLICE OF LIFE

by RICK LOVECCHIO

The comment is too often made
That Victorians were stodgy and staid—
And yet looking back
At the work of young Jack,
The Ripper was quite a gay blade.

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THE STAIRS OF SAND

by PETER GODFREY

"William Simmons?"

"Yes, sir."

"You will kindly address your replies not to me, but to His Lordship. Now: Your name is William Simmons?"

"Yes, my Lord."

"You are charged with the crime of murder, in that on the night of August 12, 2088, at Esher, in the county of Surrey, you wilfully killed by strangulation one Joseph Dexter. How do you plead—guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, my Lord."

What did they expect me to say? I killed Dexter, didn't I? That's the plain physical fact. My fingers gripped his throat, iron entered my muscles, my hate and fear galvanized my strength, and he was dead.

Guilty, my Lord! That's all I can tell the law, and all that the law really wants to know.

So many things have deteriorated, you see. Almost everything.

Nor is it hard to isolate the reason for this. I'm not quoting from my own experience, you must understand—that would be too arrogant. None of this reasoning arises out of my own memory, which is notoriously nonexistent. Recently, though, I've studied the history books and come to my own conclusions.

I think the basic start of this cultural regression was the discovery that human life could not exist in the cosmos beyond a few thousand miles from Earth itself, because space ships had continually to be refueled and revictualed.

The realization was a great shock to humanity. War had been abolished for so long and the population explosion so great that humanity suddenly found itself face to face with its greatest crisis in a long history of crises.

So, in a series of carefully calculated measures, the World Government deliberately took steps to defederate itself. At the same

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time, all over the world the massive propaganda machines strained themselves to stimulate new regional patriotism. Old idealism and old grudges burst into flame. One last solemn international agreement was entered into to ban nuclear, bacteriological, and certain chemical weapons, and then the war to start wars again was allowed to commence.

On both sides, all the propaganda emphasis was directed approvingly to a virtue that had not been thought about for many generations—courage. The hero became an idealized figure; the coward was scorned and detested by all.

When we went back to war, all our culture seemed somehow to slip back in time, too. As children in school, learning history, we used to laugh at the uncivilized attitudes of the imperial patriots—now, suddenly, we all became super-jingos ourselves. And despite the horrors of the new war, some of it carried on after the armistice was signed.

Tastes changed. There was an overt groping on the video scene toward romantic and violent plays. These usually took the form of historical tales. The playwright Shakespeare was the most popular, perhaps because he was so imaginative and versatile. And he was easy to produce, too.

Likewise, the law itself changed. Old shibboleths like extenuating circumstances, psychological stress, and rehabilitation were too closely and uncomfortably associated with similar liberal sentiments which had been reviled during the war as cowardice. As a consequence, the law began to move away from humanitarianism and toward revengeful punishment. Someone has been killed and so someone must be put to death in retaliation. An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.

But whatever people say, I know, just because I am guilty, that there are things even more important than the physical facts.

The gleam in Dexter's eye, for instance, when he spoke about the Heroes Clubs. "I can't understand you, Simmons. All over the world, in the smallest villages as well as the cities and towns, clubs are being formed. You yourself say all your friends are joining, yet you still hang back. Why?"

"I don't know. There's something—I can't quite give it a name. That's why I'm here. I thought perhaps if I spoke to you, the leader and originator of the movement, I might overcome this doubt."

"What do you want to know?"

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"About the ultimate aims of the movement. Not what appears in the brochures, but what you yourself feel."

His expression was half puzzled, half flattered. I could see his eyes trying to read the emotions behind the disfiguring scar on my face. "I still don't understand," he said. "After all, you went through the war."

"Perhaps it's because of the war that I'm doubtful."

He shrugged. "Well, what can I tell you? The Heroes Clubs are, as their name implies, clubs for heroes."

"I'm no hero."

"Of course you are. Any man who saw action is a hero. I think I know your trouble now, Simmons. You've come back from all that hell, seen all the promises made to you go up in smoke, and now you're so disillusioned you're not prepared to believe anything. Join up with us, man—and help."

I said: "I'm a member of an ex-serviceman's organization, the Corps. In what way is your movement superior?"

"In every way. Like you, we keep alive the comradeship of the slit trench, the brotherhood under a hail of life-threats. But in every way we go further. You help the ex-serviceman by lending him money, petitioning higher authority, and so on. In other words, you *ask* for favors. We in the Heroes Clubs *demand* our rights."

I tried to bring him down to earth. "That's theoretical quibbling. What different methods can you use in practice?"

The light in his eye was wild. "We fought in the war in order to change the world—and the battle is not yet over for us. We, those who earned the right to be considered a new aristocracy through bloodshed and pain endured, why shouldn't we control the countries we fought for?"

I said: "The war took something from all of us. How can you be sure it left us fit to govern?"

"Because in this shattered world we're the cream—and cream always rises to the top."

"So does scum."

His face suddenly purpled.

I went on: "So what is your plan? Are you starting a new political party?"

"No!" He almost spat out the word—and then, suddenly, laughed. "I told you we are different. All this trumpery of government and democracy is designed only to impress fools, and to keep power out of the hands of those who deserve to rule. But that situation will

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soon be reversed. How? I'll tell you, my friend. By two powerful factors—leadership and organization. I am the leader, and the organization is now nearly complete."

He peered into my face again as though trying to read my thoughts. "In every country of the world there are Heroes Clubs. Our total membership is colossal—and for every hundred members we have thousands of friends and sympathizers. When the time comes, in every center of population on the globe the Clubs will simply march in and take over the machinery of government. Nobody will want to do anything about it. Even the armed forces will be on our side. I'll give a word of command, and in a few hours the old order will disappear and the new era will be firmly in control."

It was strange he should talk so frankly. I had the feeling that somehow my disfigured lack of expression had egged him on.

"I see," I said. "You're aiming at revolution. And what sort of society will you set up? The ordinary civilians who also made their wartime sacrifices, what will be their relationship with your new aristocracy?"

"I'll proceed on the principle that he who isn't for us is our enemy. But that's only a theoretical conception—there will be no opposition. As for how I will rule, I will rule as the military machine rules, my friend—by edict. I'll give an order, and three hundred million followers will spring to attention and obey. Can you imagine what that will mean for the world? Rule by efficiency, no bureaucratic delays, no vacillating debates—one command, and what is possible to be done will be done."

I burst out then: "Of course there'll be opposition! Do you really think the men who went through all those horrors and returned with a deep perception of themselves as individuals will allow themselves to become puppets again? Follow you blindly into an international dictatorship? Do you imagine they'll be bluffed indefinitely by the pseudo-idealism under which you cloak your lust for power?"

Again he laughed. "I see I've misjudged you, Simmons. But I'm not afraid of you, or of all the other cowards and pacifists in the world. Even if you started organizing against me tonight and everyone believed you, you wouldn't be nearly ready as an effective opposition by the time I order the takeover."

It was his confidence more than anything that provoked the feeling of desperation in me. "And if you do gain power," I said, "what then? Do you think we cowards and pacifists, as you call us, will simply leave it at that?"

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"That contingency has been considered," he said. "After I've gained power, there will be no more cowards and pacifists."

I gasped. "Do I understand that as leader of the Heroes Clubs, you would order the extermination of all those whose sentiments might prejudice your position?"

"That is correct."

"Then you will never give that order, Dexter," I said.

"And after you heard the noise, Mrs. Dexter, what did you do?"
"I took my husband's pistol and came down the stairs."
"What did you see?"
"The accused was bending over my husband's body."
"You spoke to him?"
"Yes. I asked him what had happened."
"And he replied?"
"That he had killed my husband."
"Then what did you do?"
"I detained him with the pistol while I telephoned the police."

When I looked up, it was the pistol I saw first, a gleaming mouth ready to spit death. Then I became conscious of the human being holding it.

There was a large vase of flowers on the table at the foot of the stairs, and the wallpaper had a rose-cluster pattern. Her black negligee was almost indistinguishable from the shadows and the flower motif momentarily camouflaged her pale face with the red slash of her lips. Perhaps that was why I saw the pistol first, or perhaps it was because the kind of death I fear most is a bullet searing through my flesh.

There was a long pause after I told her I had killed her husband. At least it seemed long to me, because there appeared to be no reason for it. Then it occurred to me that she must hate me, that she might be contemplating shooting me. In a flash of panic I cried out: "Why don't you call the police?"

Her voice shook, but her hand was steady. "First there is something I must know. Why did you do it?"

"Because of the Heroes Clubs," I told her.

Her eyes narrowed with pain. "Judas Iscariot!" she said.

Did her finger whiten on the trigger?

"Don't shoot!" I said wildly.

"No, not Judas. You're too much of a coward even for that." Then

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she broke out fiercely: "Oh, you *fool!* If you'd killed him for any of a dozen reasons—his cruelty, his intolerance, his fear of being hurt—but to murder him for the one decent thing he'd applied his energy to since the war, the one thing that made me see in him something of the man I thought I'd married!"

"Decent!" I said bitterly. "Is that what you call his scheme of enslavement? Was his megalomania the quality you admired? Was it your ambition to be the power behind the throne of the Emperor of the World?"

She stared at me. "Is that the interpretation you put on the Heroes Clubs? You idiot, can't you realize my husband was working for a great ideal, without any thought of himself? Oh, the war was cruel to him, I'll admit, but it wasn't for any motive of revenge that he started the movement. It was because he felt that the men who had suffered could best ensure that there would be no more suffering."

I said: "I'm one of those who suffered. If that had been his motive, I'd have been his most devoted follower. But all he wanted was personal power. Did you know he was prepared to exterminate anyone who opposed his views?"

"I don't believe it."

"It's true, nevertheless. I saw him tonight for what he is—a monster prepared to wade through human blood to perpetuate power."

"And that's why you killed him?"

"That's why I killed him."

There was a pause, then: "I don't know why I talk to you," she said.

I knew, though. It was to convince herself of the untruth of the doubt I had raised in her mind.

She went on: "You remember before the war how famous Joe Dexter was? There was hardly a week between the stories of his exploits in the newspapers. His car and plane racing, his Amazon exploration, his mountain-climbing and big-game triumphs. I was a schoolgirl then, and like so many others I made Joe something of a personal hero, although I'd never met him.

"Then one night he gave a lecture in our town. I've heard it said that when you worship from afar you're always disappointed on closer contact. But it wasn't that way with Joe. He had a vibrancy that pictures and articles didn't show and my imagination hadn't supplied. Little things. Like an unconscious gesture he had of crooking the fingers of his right hand and running the thumb over the fingertips. It was a gesture so gentle, yet so full of resolve.

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"That night, though I didn't actually meet him, I stopped worshiping him like a schoolgirl and began to love him as a woman.

"The next time I saw him was years later, when I was a nurse at a military hospital near Darwin, Australia. I wouldn't have known it was Joe if it hadn't been for his identification tag. The first time I undid the bandages round his head, I tensed myself for the shock of the disfiguring wound, but I was still not prepared for the featureless bloody mask that met my eyes. That gesture, too, that had thrilled me so had been left behind on the battlefield with his right arm.

"He lay there for months, mostly unconscious, barely living, but I had several photographs of him and the surgeon was interested in his case. After the seventeenth operation, his face was as you knew it—less mobile and expressive than before but identical, feature for feature.

"We were married three days after his discharge. Then I found that what the surgeon had done for him hadn't been enough. The surgery he needed most was to his mind.

"He was taciturn—abnormally so. His every action was mean and vindictive. And then one day when we were out together, a savage dog attacked us. He gave a whimper of fear and thrust me as a shield between the animal and himself." Her voice was charged with emotion. "I should have left him then. Afterward, though, when he started to organize the Heroes Clubs, I was glad I'd hung back.

"Not that it made any difference in his treatment of me. He seemed to disregard me more and more. Sometimes I was chattel to be used, when he had guests another ornament in his house, never a woman to whom he could pour out his dream. But I saw the dream clearly, for all that. I saw it in his concentration, in his quicker movements, in the set of his jaw, in the light in his eyes when he spoke about the Clubs."

"You saw something in him of the man you first knew?"

"No," she said, "don't misunderstand me. He wasn't the same. There had been a charm about him before—but the war killed that. It just seemed to me that in this new energy he had found a weapon against his memory of the war, a weapon of revenge for him and for me."

I said: "No, you're wrong. All he felt was a lust for power."

"When you think of the war," she asked suddenly, "what emotion do you feel?"

"Horror," I said. "I smell the death and feel as though at any

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moment there can be searing pain—and something tugging at my muscles, trying to force me to run."

There was triumph in her voice. "I knew it—you're a coward. But he had something inside him even the war couldn't kill. Something that forced him to be a fighter to the last."

I stood silent, conscious only of the muzzle of the pistol, the life pulsing in my veins, the death at my feet.

She said, "I don't know why I want you to understand, but I do. I want you to realize what he was fighting. War, yes, and what war can do. Think back on actual incidents—shellfire, dive-bombers coming at you, perhaps—anything that actually happened to you in those days. Do you remember?" She paused, waiting for my answer, ready to draw from it her moral, a logical conclusion.

"Remember? No," I said. "No, I don't remember."

"You are a mental specialist, Dr. Andrews?"

"A psychoneurologist—yes."

"Under what circumstances did you meet the accused?"

"I treated him as a patient in Kookaburra Military Hospital and later I attended him privately in this country after his discharge."

"What was the nature of his illness?"

"Amnesia—loss of memory."

"When did you cease treatment?"

"On May fifth of this year."

"That was approximately three months before the murder. Was the accused cured?"

"No. I'd done everything I could without getting results. I told him that his cure could be a matter of choice. Some casual incident or scene might suffice to bring his memory back."

"Have you examined the accused since the murder?"

"Yes, three days ago."

"And you came to what conclusion?"

"That he is still suffering from amnesia."

Coming home—only I didn't recognize it as home. Strange place, strange people. A visitor, not a returning son.

Vividly conscious that I was William Simmons, corporal, of Weybridge, Surrey, who joined the King's Twelfth Infantry in Guildford in 2081, fought in Malaysia and Australia, twice wounded—but conscious of it not as a memory, but as information typed for me from military papers and read over and over again. Not a prominent

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citizen, anyway, or someone would have recognized me despite the scar. Unknown, unwanted, a stranger, with a great loneliness and a mysterious sense of loss.

Looking through the records once again, there I am—William Simmons, born November 14, 2059. Father dead, mother dead, no other family. The place where I'd once lived blasted clean off the earth and now the site of an imposing block of luxury apartments. A nobody returning to nothing.

Then finding companionship in the Corps, building a new life and new friendships with all those others who had been lucky enough to return from the war. Looking forward all week to the Thursday-night gatherings, the cheerful conversation. Living again.

"Those Aussie kids in Canberra—remember how they used to beg for food?"

"God, that dust! Remember when there wasn't enough water how the boys all used to dream of cold beer?"

I lied. I said I remembered.

Then all the happiness shattered, so quickly, so insidiously. Men coming in saying, "I won't be in next Thursday, I've joined the Heroes Club." First one or two, then more and more, until finally there were only three left in the Corps.

"Why don't you join up, too, Bill? What's your objection?"

I had no logical motive, just an unreasoning unease, and the fear, not of present pain, but of being hurt in the future.

Then Dexter arrived on the scene.

"In amnesia cases, Dr. Andrews, does the patient forget everything? *Does he lose the faculty of remembering incidents that occur after the onset of the illness?"*

"No. This type of amnesia does not involve actual brain damage. The illness is caused by psychological shock. The patient does not recall details of the shock or anything prior to that shock, but he will remember subsequent events clearly."

"So that an amnesia sufferer can still weigh up conflicting arguments, decide right from wrong?"

"Yes."

"In other words, in the present case, if the accused suffered the primary psychological shock prior to the murder, at the time of the crime he would be quite competent to realize the implications of what he was doing?"

"Yes."

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"And in point of fact the accused did *suffer that primary shock long before the murder?"*

"Yes. He was reported as an amnesia case in Kookaburra in March, 2086."

Australia, March 2086, Hospital. Dull ache in the back, burning pain in the face. Thick lips mumbling through bandages, "Doctor, can't we try again?"

"Don't be impatient, Simmons. It'll come to you eventually. Now—did you dream last night?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

"I was in a garden and wanted to dig. I looked around for a spade, but there was only a broken piece of handle stuck in the ground. Just then a bee came buzzing up. I thought it was going to sting me and ran for the house. The door was locked and when I banged on it it suddenly changed to heavy black curtains. They fell over my head and I woke up."

"How do you feel about that dream, Simmons? Was it pleasant or unpleasant to you?"

"Very unpleasant, sir."

"Oh? Well, let's see if you can remember exactly what emotions were roused in you by the different elements of the dream. The garden?"

"Only the feeling that I had a duty to dig."

"The broken spade?"

"A sort of relief, sir—as though I was rather glad I didn't have to dig at all."

"The bee?"

"Fear."

"The locked door?"

"A sense of frustration."

"The curtains falling over your head?"

"That was horrible, sir. *They were velvet, and they—choked."*

"Feeling better this morning, Simmons?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, let's discover how much you've progressed. Think back. What's your earliest memory?"

"Lying in this bed."

"There must be something before that."

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"No. Yes. The feel of the sheets."

"And even before that?"

"Nothing, sir. Just black."

"What kind of black? A dark night?"

"No, sir. More solid. Like a curtain—a heavy velvet curtain."

"You can feel it with your hands?"

"Yes."

"Right. Now keep your eyes closed, Simmons—and concentrate hard. It's only a curtain, understand? Just a harmless length of cloth. So, push! Push it aside with your arms and walk through."

"I can't. There are too many folds. *They're falling over my face!*"

"It's only a curtain, Simmons, only a curtain. *Push.* Do you hear me? Force yourself through!"

"Oh, my God! I'm smothering!"

"Let's try some word association. You don't have to think for this. I say a word and you tell me the first word that comes into your mind. Ready?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Cat?"

"Dog."

"Dog?"

"Fight."

"Fight?"

"Dig."

"Dig?"

"Bee."

"Bee?"

"Run."

"Run?"

"Door."

"Door?"

"Curtain."

"Curtain?"

"Oh, no, sir, no!"

"William Simmons, you have pleaded guilty, and on the evidence before me this court must accept your plea as correct without the slightest hesitation. There remains, then, only the possibility of extenuating circumstances.

"Your defense counsel has argued that your amnesia indicates a

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lack of mental balance. This contention has been rebutted by the prosecution. The only concern of the law is whether, at the moment of the commission of the crime, the accused knows what he is doing and is able to assess the consequences of his action. This court has no doubt you were mentally competent at the time of your crime.

"In your own evidence, you alleged your motive was political, that the deceased was plotting a form of revolution. In the absence of any corroborative evidence, this court cannot believe that story. Not only did the deceased have a fine military record, but his entire career seems to have been based on patriotism coupled with humanitarian missions in no way consistent with the motives described to him by you.

"But even if the court was disposed to believe your story, it could not accept that motive as an extenuating circumstance. Murder can never be considered a justifiable method of removing political differences.

"Although there may be some doubt as to your real motive, the physical facts of the case are perfectly clear. They are that on the night of August twelfth of last year, being at the time sound of mind and body, you attacked and strangled to death a one-armed and defenseless man—a crime which can only be described as brutal and cowardly. It is therefore the sentence of this court that you be taken from here to the place from whence you came—"

And from there to this place, to hang by the neck until I'm dead.

Three weeks ago he said it, and I can still hear his voice: "At a time and place to be appointed." This place. Tomorrow.

For a brutal and cowardly crime.

Am I really a coward? The judge thinks so, *she* thinks so, the world thinks so. But what do I think?

If you take the physical facts, as the judge did, as she did, then I am. But isn't there something over and above the physical facts?

Let me take stock of myself. Repentance? No, I'm not sorry I killed Dexter. I think if I could relive it and all that's happened since, I'd do it again. Fear? I don't think so. My mind doesn't dwell on tomorrow.

Or perhaps I don't think of tomorrow because I *am* afraid?

Well, there's one way to judge. Imagine. They come for me. The straps tighten around my arms. The strangling noose— Yes, I am afraid.

But does fear necessarily indicate cowardice? Is a man brave be-

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cause he feels no fear, or because he persists in a course of action despite fear? The torture is that I can't decide. If only I knew what kind of man I was before the amnesia, what my ambitions were, what emotions I'd experienced, then perhaps I could judge.

"Simmons!"
"Yes, warder?"
"The chaplain is outside. Won't you see him today, old man?"
"No. I don't want to see him."
"Okay. Sorry I interrupted your concentration."
"How did you know I was concentrating?"
"By your habit."
"My habit?"
"Yes. The way you bend your right hand and run your thumb over the tips of your fingers."

In a vivid mental flash, I saw her again, behind the gun. I heard her voice. "So typical, that gesture." The words came loud and clear, yet somehow they seemed very far away. The folds of the dark curtain were about me, not choking this time, but pulling aside, meter upon meter of it, swifter and swifter, so that the nap of the velvet on my face sent tiny shocks up my spine. Then the curtain was gone, and I was on the other side.

I was Joe Dexter, and I was sharing a shellhole with a man who gibbered and scrabbled with frenzied fingers to dig himself deeper and deeper into the mud. He was mad with fear. I think it was the Helli that did it. We had gone for so long without meeting those sharks of the sky that the sudden appearance of this one was a dreadful shock. Its zooming buzz over the crump of the shells seemed to be the last straw for him.

Twice I had to hit him to keep him from running into the open, and each time the desperation of the blows helped allay the rising tide of panic within me. Then, just as I thought he was going to lie quiet, he twisted from my grasp and ran.

Not far, though. A mortar shell got him, and tore off his face and his right arm, blew him out of his clothes, and hurled his body back into the shellhole.

And the faceless thing he now was was still unconscious, still gibbered, still scrabbled with its remaining fingers into the dirt.

I, too, went mad then. By a strange mental paradox, I accepted the terror of the moment. It was what the future might hold that

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cut my soul like a knife. In one second, a thousand memories buffeted my mind. I smelled the fetid smell of the Amazon undergrowth, flinched from the unexpected hissing snarl of a jaguar, felt the wind from the rhino's horn as it charged me at Serengheti, knew the fragmentation of my nerves as my car smashed through the race-track barrier, saw the screaming headlines, heard again the sandy-haired little man on the bus say: "What will this fellow Dexter do next?"

I saw the future then, the war over, but peace bringing a thousand new perils I'd have to face just because I was Joe Dexter and that is what my public would expect of me. And I saw each picture individually, and I lived how I would feel—with terror rasping my spine, and overtaxed nerves shivering for peace.

I thought of the peace that only death could provide. But when I thought of death, a greater fear, like cold feathers, whirled inside me.

I thought, Why shouldn't he be Joe Dexter?

And the idea prompted my muscles before it reached my mind. I found I had already torn off my uniform and my right hand was bleeding from the force with which I'd wrenched off my wrist-chain and identity disc. I knelt down to do the same to the half man lying there before realization froze me. His arm—it was gone. I'd forgotten that.

I crawled out, hugging the ground until I reached the new crater. I searched round the center, up the sides, the edges. Then the odds against finding what I sought in the dark struck me suddenly like a blow. But as it did, there was a flash from a nearby explosion and I saw a wrist with extended fingers protruding from the dirt. I gripped it like the hand of a long-absent friend and the arm pulled out easily.

It took only seconds to change identity discs. Back I crept, dragging the arm with me, to throw it into my old shellhole—the arm that belonged to the naked, faceless body there, the arm that now bore the identity disc of Joe Dexter.

I had no plan, just an exultation at cheating the future and an urge to get as far away from this spot as possible. I had no fear, either. I didn't know whose name I'd taken—all I could think of was that a body would be found and identified as Joe Dexter. And I'd be free.

So I crawled away. And the Helli came again, like a big fat bumble-

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bee, swooping low as I froze to the ground. Then it was gone, mumbling in the distance.

But it came back, from behind this time, and, the smell of death in my nostrils, I ran.

There was a building ahead of me—solid, with a large door that seemed to leap at me with every stride I took, and the drone behind me was rising to an angry crescendo. I reached the door. There was no handle, and in a frenzy of fear I beat at it with my fists. The earth shook with a roar and the coarse grain of the door turned into heavy folds, a velvet curtain, falling over my eyes, into my nostrils and throat, choking, smothering.

And when I woke again, they told me I was William Simmons.

So that maimed and gibbering thing, who I now know to have been Simmons, didn't die after all. He, too, had been taken to hospital, and from his identity disc they had obtained my name—Joe Dexter.

And she was there, with her scrapbook and pictures of me, from which they made him a new face—my face.

I can imagine him there, lying in his bed, his poor brain twisting in confusion, gradually coming to the conclusion that the real Joe Dexter must be dead. Listening to her reading from the scrapbook, saying nothing, but taking in everything about my past—convincing himself that he could carry on the bluff.

It must have been a bad moment for him, though, when I told him my name was William Simmons. I remember his expression. It seemed strange to me then—fearful and doubtful at the same time—but as the conversation progressed, other emotions were reflected in his features. I understand them now—hope, the saving thought that Simmons was a common enough name and in this case merely a coincidence, and finally conviction and complete relief.

God, that's ironic. It was the feeling of relief that loosened his tongue—and because he talked so freely, I killed him. And there's an ultimate irony, too. They're going to hang me tomorrow for killing Joe Dexter. They're going to execute me for murdering myself. But surely, if it wasn't Dexter who was my victim— No, that's no use. I killed a man, whatever he called himself.

A cowardly crime, the judge said. Good. Then I'll go to the scaffold as William Simmons, the coward—and Simmons *was* a coward. And Joe Dexter will have died a brave man—appropriate, too, because he always was a brave man.

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Cowardice? Bravery? How much do they really depend on the outward show of things? If she could have seen him cowering in the shellhole, heard his whimpering fear, could she ever have brought herself to marry such a man? Even when his soul became obvious to her, she made allowances because she thought he was Joe Dexter.

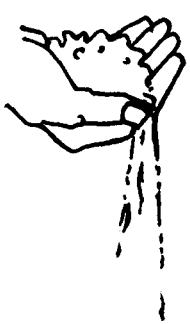
Yet she talked to me, poured out her heart, though she thought I was a coward and she hated cowardice. I wonder why. Perhaps she recognized something about me even behind the scar. Maybe with some dim, imperceptible sense her spirit saw in me the essence of the man she really loved.

No, why should I bluff myself now? Fundamentally, I'm a coward, too—what happened on the battlefield proves that. Not like Simmons—not afraid of death, but of life. In my own way as great a craven.

There's something in *The Merchant of Venice*—how does it go?

"How many cowards, whose hearts are all as false
As stairs of sand, wear yet upon their chins
The beards of Hercules and frowning Mars,
Who, inward searched, have livers white as milk,
And these assume but valour's excrement
To render them redoubted."

"Did you call, Simmons?"
"Oh—sorry, warder. No, just another habit. Reciting aloud."



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ELLERY QUEEN

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15 WORD MINIMUM
Only $48.00 for 15 Words or Less
$3.20 each additional word
Capitalized words add—40¢ per word
SAVE 15% WITH 3 CONSECUTIVE MONTHS SAME COPY ORDER

DEADLINE: Copy and payment must be in by the 5th day of the third preceding month for issue in which ad is to appear.

(PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE)

YOUR NAME _____

FIRM (NAME IN AD) _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ **STATE** _____ **ZIP** _____

PHONE: _____ **DATE:** _____

YOUR SIGNATURE _____

_____ Words at $3.20 each $ _____

_____ Capitalized word at .40¢ each
Total amount for 1 ad $ _____

15% Savings with 3 Consecutive Months Discount

(a) Multiply one ad total $_____ x 3 - $ _____
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(Example One 15 word ad $48.00 x 3 months $144.00 x .85 $122.40)

$_____ is enclosed for _____ insertion(s) in the _____ issue(s) _____ Heading

(FOR ADDITIONAL WORDS ATTACH SEPARATE SHEET)

(1) **$48.00**	(2) **$48.00**	(3) **$48.00**	(4) **$48.00**	(5) **$48.00**
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(21) **$67.20**	(22) **$70.40**	(23) **$73.60**	(24) **$76.80**	(25) **$80.00**
(26) **$83.20**	(27) **$86.40**	(28) **$89.60**	(29) **$92.80**	(30) **$96.00**

HOW TO COUNT WORDS: Name and address must be included in counting the number of Words in your ad. Each initial or number counts as 1 word. Mark Holly 380 Lexington Avenue, New York, New York 10017 7 WORDS. Zip codes are not counted. Phone # 2 Words. Symbols used as keys are charged for. City or State count as 1 word each. Garden City, New York 2 words. Abbreviations such as C.O.D. F.O.B. P.O. U.S.A. 7x10, 35mm count as 1 word. (P.O. Box 145 count as 3 words) Webster's International Unabridged Dictionary will be used as our authority for spelling, compound words, hyphens, abbreviations, etc. **Please make checks payable to ELLERY QUEEN MAGAZINE.**

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EDWARD D. HOCH (about Nick Velvet)

ROBERT BARNARD (about the face of violence)

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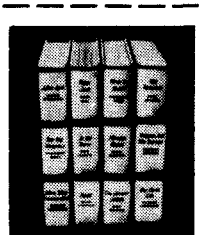

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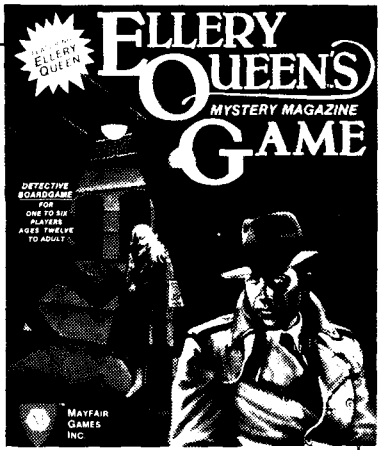

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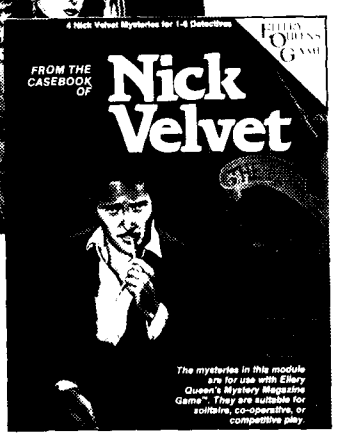
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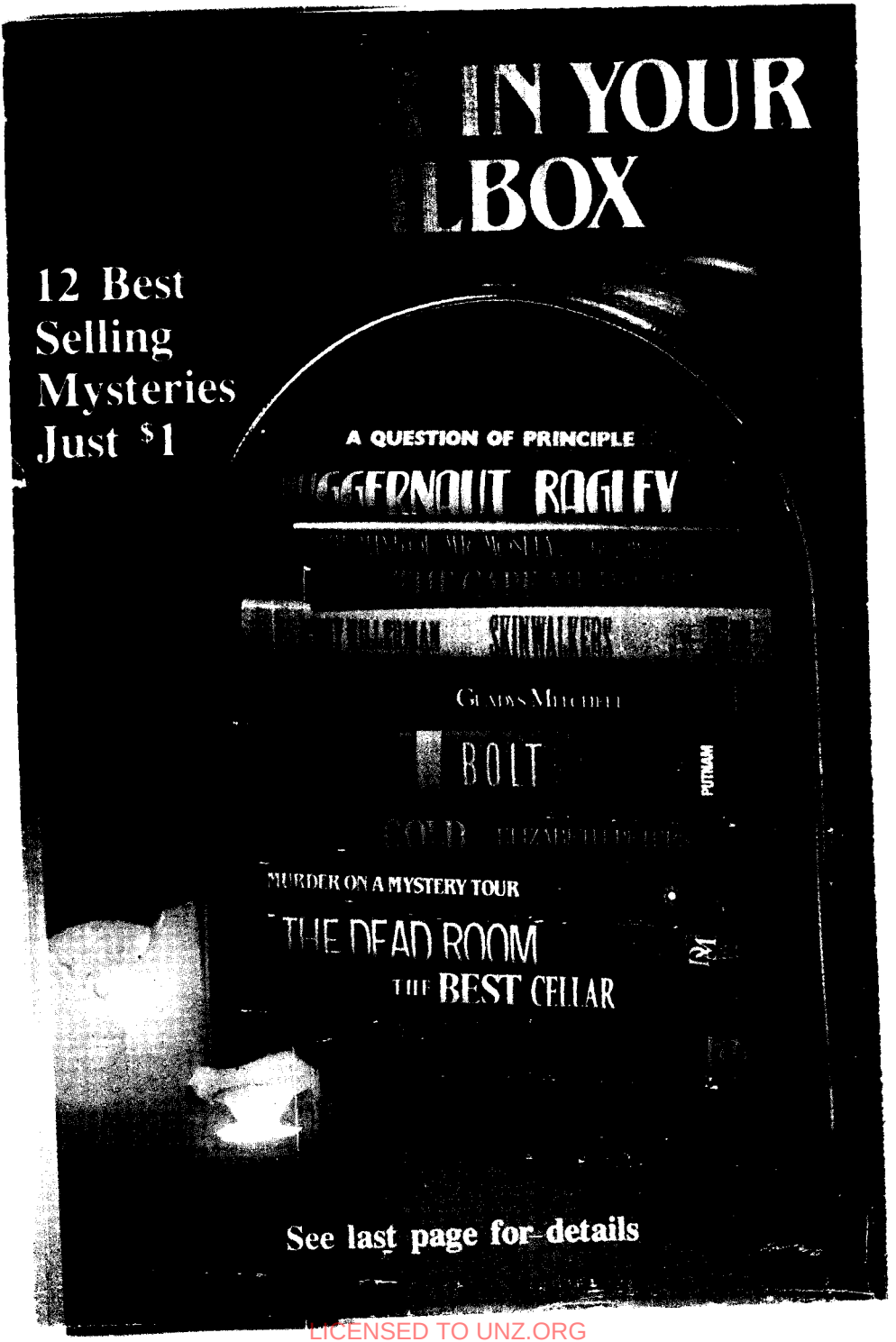

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